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This thesis is my own original work.

\[\text{Signature}\]
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Abbreviations

A2, United States National Archives (II), Maryland.
ANZAM, Australia, New Zealand, and Malaya area command structure.
ANZUS, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States treaty.
CRO, Commonwealth Relations Office, Britain.
CSC, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Australia.
DAFP, Documents on Australian Foreign Policy.
DC, Defence Committee, Australia.
DEA, Department of External Affairs, Australia.
DNG, Dutch New Guinea.
DT, Department of Territories, Australia.
ENG, East New Guinea.
FC, First Committee, United Nations General Assembly.
FO, Foreign Office, Britain.
FRUS, Foreign Relations of the United States.
GA, General Assembly Plenary Meetings, United Nations General Assembly.
GC, General Committee, United Nations General Assembly.
GOI, Government of Indonesia.
JIC, Joint Intelligence Committee, Australia.
JPC, Joint Planning Committee, Australia.
NAA, National Archives of Australia.
NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.
NG, New Guinea.
NNG, Netherlands New Guinea.
NSC, National Security Council, United States.
NZ, New Zealand.
Parliamentary Debates, Australian Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives.
PKI, Communist Party of Indonesia.
PNG, Papua and New Guinea.
PMD, Prime Minister’s Department, Australia.
PRO, Public Record Office, London.
PRRI, Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia.
Republic, Republic of the United States of Indonesia, Republic of Indonesia.
SEA, Southeast Asia.
SEATO, South East Asia Treaty Organisation.
UAP, United Australia Party.
UK, United Kingdom.
UN, United Nations Organisation.
UP, United Press.
US, United States of America.
WNG, West New Guinea.

Note: Inverted commas (‘‘) are added by me (except in regard to the names of articles) to emphasize particular words or phrases. Quotation marks (“”) indicate genuine quotations.
Abstract

Historians of Australian foreign policy have neglected the WNG dispute. This is unjustified because it was a major preoccupation of the Menzies Government between 1950 and 1962. The neglect has also had an unfortunate consequence; generalizations by historians regarding Australian policy in SEA during the 1950s and 1960s are questionable. Specifically, the common notions that Australia was afraid of SEA, and therefore saw itself as being dependent on Britain and America, are in need of scrutiny.

Examination of Australian policy between 1950 and 1957, with particular reference to the years 1950 and 1954, shows that Australia was not afraid of its principal adversary on WNG – Indonesia. Australians thus did not pursue dependence, or perceive themselves as dependent, on their two principal allies. Rather, Australians viewed their nation to be the ‘imperial’ power of the area south of Singapore.

With the perceived growth from late 1957 of a communist threat in Indonesia, Australia began to lose its sense of invulnerability from Jakarta. Policy on WNG shows that this anxiety led, in stages, to greater dependence on the United States and United Kingdom, and loss of faith in the concept of Australia as a middle power able to assert influence in its north. By the time the British and Americans decided to force a transfer of WNG to Indonesia, this faith had been almost completely destroyed, although the circumstances of the fait accompli from London and Washington added insecurity to dependence. Fear of Indonesia, accompanied by an insecure form of dependence, which stood in contrast to the fearlessness and independence exuded for much of the 1950s, is important to an understanding of Australian activities and attitudes in the SEA area during the 1960s.

The detailed archival work on which this thesis depends also allows numerous corrections and additions to be made to available reminiscences and partial accounts on WNG.
Introduction

Any student of Australian involvement in the West New Guinea (WNG) dispute between 1950 and 1962 is soon struck by one simple fact; historians of Canberra’s post-War policies in Southeast Asia (SEA) have shown – and continue to show – scant interest in the issue. There is no published work, using archival material, that covers the entire period. A similarly simple, though less obvious, point is that they have focussed almost exclusively on either Australian Government attitudes to events on mainland SEA, or what are perceived as the formal manifestations of Australian policy. Two of the more prominent publications of recent years, for example, have primarily examined Australia’s engagement in SEA during the 1950s and early 1960s via the Australia-New Zealand-United States (ANZUS) alliance, the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), commitments to Malaya, and various crises in Indochina.1

This trend, coupled with neglect of the WNG problem, is both unjustified and unfortunate. It is unjustified because it fails to reflect accurately what was thought to be important at the time. The Liberal-Country Government and the Australian public were equally as, or perhaps more, concerned with events surrounding WNG as they were with those centred on SEA’s mainland or with the treaties to which the nation was party. Sir Walter Crocker, in this period an International Relations scholar and Australian diplomat, gave a clue to the importance of WNG by asserting in his memoirs that the Government and electorate had three major “preoccupations” in these years, one of which was “the future of Dutch New Guinea”.2 Apart from such participant testimonies, the sheer mass of documentation on WNG in relation to other aspects of Australian SEA policy provides eloquent witness to the contemporary significance of the subject.

The neglect of WNG by historians is closely related to the failure by general commentators to account for WNG’s past importance. Indeed, generalizations about Australian policy in SEA during the 1950s and into the 1960s must be deemed open to question if they are based upon samples that exclude a principal concern of the Liberal Government and the Australian public. A fundamental objective of this thesis is to determine whether certain of these generalizations are in need of adjustment, and if so, to suggest corrections.

The exact generalizations examined relate to two basic and interrelated questions that have occupied, to a greater or lesser extent, the thoughts of most pupils of

Australian post-War foreign policy. Firstly, how did Australia perceive itself in relation to SEA and, secondly, how did it view itself in relation to the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK)? The answer usually provided is that Australia saw itself as a vulnerable outpost of Western civilization, and therefore, whilst seeking greater understanding with SEA countries, believed itself to be dependent on its ‘great and powerful friends’.

In other words, Australians were afraid of living on the rim of SEA, and consequently sought the protection of the UK, and increasingly that of the US. In The Frightened Country, for instance, Alan Renouf has written that the “first hallmark” of Liberal-Country foreign policy (which included its outlook on SEA) from 1950-67 was “Deep concern for security, even fear” – a phenomenon that worked itself out in reliance upon Britain “as the keystone to Australian security”, and in the pursuit of “the same intimacy with the US”.

In the same vein, David Lee, in his revelingly titled book, Search for Security, argues that, apart from economic considerations, Liberal foreign policy was marked by fear of war, and a decision in the mid-1950s to find refuge in East Asia primarily under a US, rather than a UK, umbrella. This position – that Australia felt exposed in SEA and sought dependence on the British and, or, Americans – has achieved such widespread acceptance that its full and explicit elucidation is often not seen as a necessary partner to its common use as a foundation for historical enquiry. Such a tendency is most obvious in the numerous works that seek to scrutinize Australia’s activities in SEA almost purely in terms of Australia’s relationships with the British and Americans.

There, the overwhelming aim is to

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1 In this thesis, the concepts of middle, small, major, independent, and dependent powers – all of which revolve around the key theme of reliance and self-reliance – are to be understood as follows:

A middle power is a nation capable of exerting direct influence abroad in a number of areas of national interest, whether they be geographical, political, military, or economic. A lesser state, a small power, has almost no direct influence outside its borders, except perhaps where the presence of other nations is not felt, and a major power has direct influence in most areas of interest. Similarly, an independent power is largely autonomous regarding its foreign interests, as opposed to a dependent power, which is essentially subject to the help and direction provided by a greater power. (An application of these terms would, then, be that the popular view explained in the text above is that Australia was both a small and dependent power).

Other analytical terminology in the thesis is usually used in the same way; that is, it is not used in a technical sense, but is to be interpreted both generically and in relation to other generic concepts. Such general language is employed because the predominant History debate on the period still uses broad language; it is a debate which has not yet been overtaken by technical definition. For an example of more technical studies, see R. W. Cox with T. J. Sinclair, Approaches to World Order, New York, 1996, and A. F. Cooper, R. A. Higgott and K. R. Nossal, Relocating Middle Powers: Australia and Canada in a Changing World Order, Vancouver, 1993.


4 See, for example, C. Bridge (ed.), Munich to Vietnam: Australia’s Relations with Britain and the United States Since the 1930’s, Melbourne, 1991, N. Harper, A Great and Powerful Friend: A Study of
determine how, and sometimes when, Australia came to lean on Washington more than London, but the assumption behind this goal — the dependence necessitated by fear of Asia — is rarely thought to need prominent acknowledgement or vigorous defence.

A more specific formulation of a central goal of this thesis is, therefore, as follows: to ask, using the WNG ‘preoccupation’ as a case study, whether Australians were indeed afraid of SEA in the period 1950-1962, and whether, as a result, they saw dependence on the US and UK as both a fact and a vital pursuit. In terms of method, a number of points must be made. Certain periods of the WNG dispute are examined in detail for two reasons. The first is grounded on the conviction that generalizations arising from a case study can have no authority unless the study itself is accurately constructed. This is axiomatic, and yet often overlooked. A deficiency of histories of Australian foreign policy is that they are typically written by those who have not submitted themselves to the drudgery of archival labour. In some cases this is excusable, as they were written when most relevant archives were closed; often there is no such defence. In this dissertation, an attempt has been made to connect broader observations with particular actions and thoughts on WNG. Here, the requisite level of detail is substantial — especially when writing of the late 1950s and early 1960s — because of the innate complexity of the Australian position, but it means generalizations can be put forward with more confidence than is warranted in some other commentaries on Australian foreign policy. Speculation can be replaced by substance.

A second reason for closely investigating WNG is that another objective of this analysis, subsidiary to that already stated, is to add to the lamentably minute number of works on Australian policy vis-à-vis the WNG dispute. At present there are only three studies based on previously closed documents, and these have been built with the benefit of only three significant non-archival works. As part of the process of supplementing scholarship on Australian attitudes to WNG, these histories will be

_Citation: Australian American Relations between 1900 and 1975, St Lucia, 1987, and G. St J. Barclay, _Friends in High Places: Australian-American diplomatic relations since 1945_, Melbourne, 1985._


tested against the documentary record, and detailed criticisms and comments will be made in footnotes. However, the task of supplementation has overwhelmingly involved original research. This has been essential. All three archival-based studies were finished after this work was started, and, at any rate, only one – a doctoral thesis by Peter Phelps – is of substantial length.9

The lenses through which 'policy' is viewed are less original; who was making it (personalities and institutions), why (domestic, international, and personal influences), when, and how it was being implemented. A penultimate note to be made on methodology is that no attempt has been made to cover comprehensively the entire dispute. Given the dictates of the word limit, this was impossible. Instead, three periods – 1950, 1954, and 1958-62 – have been selected for detailed study. These are sufficient for the purposes outlined because the basic features of the Menzies Government policy on WNG were formed in the first period, and did not begin to change until the third. Put otherwise, the 'windows' chosen faithfully reflect the essential nature of policy.

A last point is to acknowledge the limitations of probing generalizations through case study. Reconstruction of the former can only occur to the degree allowed by the scope of the latter. Because WNG was not the only sphere in which Australia related to SEA or the US and UK, it cannot be used to define exclusively these relationships. To do so would be to fall victim to the same methodological error apparent in much post-War Australian history. Accordingly, it is not the actual issues used by other historians in making wider observations that are being challenged, or the rightful mirroring of these issues in such observations, it is the extent to which commentators have allowed certain issues to lead to simplistic interpretations of Australia's self-perception in connection with SEA and the world's two great English-speaking powers.

9 Moreover, Phelps' work, when accessed, was found to have marked differences to the near-complete research that had been done for this dissertation; Phelps' chronological focus, and his selection and interpretation of documents relevant to WNG, did not square with my own research, and has in no way had a decisive impact on its final presentation.

The Round Table Conference of 1949 formally transferred the entire Indonesian archipelago from the Dutch to their former colonial vassals. There was, however, one notable exception. The Netherlands Government refused to concede the territory of WNG, much to the chagrin of the Indonesians, who insisted that all of the former East Indies be incorporated into the new state. In fact, the conference had been saved from complete breakdown only by the last minute proposal that the WNG issue be dealt with through negotiations over the next 12 months. Thus, what had been a running sore for a number of years remained unhealed, and had actually been considerably inflamed.

The policy of Joseph Chifley’s Australian Labor Government towards WNG had essentially been one of non-involvement. As stated in an informal note to the Dutch of 20 October 1949, Australia believed that “future arrangements regarding New Guinea are primarily a matter for discussion between the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia”, although, for their part, the Australians preferred that the territory be placed under United Nations trusteeship. This was not a line that the Liberal-Country Party coalition was likely to follow unthinkingly. The Government that came into power in December 1949 did not have the same faith as Labor in the United Nations. New Prime Minister Robert Menzies was, with his Cabinet, also more sceptical of the ability of emerging Asian nations to maintain internal and regional stability and a foreign policy favourable to the West – convictions that had contributed to differences with Labor over Australian policy during the struggle for Indonesian independence.

Primary responsibility for the WNG problem lay on the desk of new Minister for External Affairs, Percy Spender. Spender, as he did in other matters, introduced a significant degree of initiative and aggression into the debate over WNG, and under him were formed what were to be for eight years the elements of Government policy on the

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1 West New Guinea will also be referred to in this study as Netherlands New Guinea (NNG) and Dutch New Guinea (DNG).
3 See informal note handed to the Dutch, 20 October 1949, and cable from the Australian Department of External Affairs (DEA) to the Australian Embassy, Washington DC, 24 November 1949, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA). Phelps, op.cit., pp. 18-27, argues persuasively that a movement developed in the Department of External Affairs during 1949 for the separation of WNG from an Indonesian state, but fails to provide evidence that this was reflected in considered Government policy. As a consequence, he tends to see the policy of the Liberal Government as a continuation of that of Labor (ibid., p. 27).
dispute. The energy he brought to the question was consistent with his personality and background, which had combined to make him one of the more assertive, determined and independent members of the Liberal Party. Spender had been a failure at school, and while working as a clerk at Sydney’s Town Hall, he was encouraged to attempt again to matriculate. This he did, and he then studied Arts and Law at night while working at the Petty Sessions office during the day. Demonstrating his tenacity, Spender came through this gruelling regime with First Class Honours and the University Medal. Afterward, starting from scratch, he built a highly successful career as a barrister, taking silk in 1934. Three years later, after being challenged in a drunken debate over dinner, he contested the Federal seat of Warringah as an independent and, extraordinarily, defeated the then Minister of Defence, Sir Archdale Parkhill, in the federal elections. Recognized for his outstanding abilities, Spender served as a Cabinet Minister soon after joining the United Australia Party (UAP), first without portfolio, later as Treasurer, and then as Minister for the Army. As the latter, he demonstrated a characteristic stubbornness – one that would later frustrate other nations with an interest in the WNG dispute – by supporting a recommendation to withdraw Australian troops from Tobruk against the will of a thoroughly displeased Churchill. The maverick trait that had led Spender into politics had not deserted him either. In 1944, by then in Opposition, he defied party discipline, and remained on the Advisory War Council. The move cost him his membership of the UAP, and he had to endure the bitterness of his colleagues, including Menzies, who was particularly venomous, but he insisted his “first and overriding obligation...[was] to the nation”. In asserting this principle, he highlighted another characteristic that was to be important in the context of his involvement in the WNG problem – that of a sense of duty.

Upon returning from the Colombo Conference, which was part of his first trip abroad as Minister in 1950, Spender briefed Cabinet on 8 February on a range of Southeast Asian issues, including the dispute over New Guinea. Here he described the recent history of the Dutch-Indonesian disagreement, along with its implications for Australia. This important report highlights some of the features of Australian Liberal thinking that were formally adopted as policy on 8 February, and were to remain prominent for much of the WNG dispute. The most fundamental idea put forward by Spender was that Australia had “vital interests” in New Guinea (NG).

5 The factual information in the following section is taken from P. C. Spender’s (Australian Minister for External Affairs) Politics and a Man, Sydney, 1972.
6 ibid., p. 233.
7 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 7-8 February 1950, in A4638/XM1, NAA.
8 Note by Spender for Cabinet presentation, 7 February 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
This notion had – relative to the length of the Australia’s ‘white’ past at least – a long history. In 1883, anxiety over German interest in NG prompted the Queensland Government to unilaterally claim the island on behalf of the Crown, and there was widespread unhappiness in the Australian colonies over Britain’s late reaction in assuming control in 1884 over only the south-eastern portion of NG.9 From this moment, fears grew that if a war started in Europe, Australia might be faced with the presence on its doorstep of a power hostile to the Empire and its dominions.10 When war did break out between Germany and England in 1914, the Australians moved against the German administrative centre at Rabaul within a matter of days. In doing so, the Federal Government was acting under British instructions,11 but the Australians also had self-centred motives, based upon concerns about their physical safety.12 Later, at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, Australian Prime Minister W. M. Hughes campaigned vigorously for the annexation of German New Guinea, arguing that “If there were at the very door of Australia a potential or actual enemy Australia could not feel safe”.13 In the end, Australia had to settle for a mandate, which produced a degree of insecurity because of the possibility that the territory might be taken from the Commonwealth Government.14

Certainly, throughout the inter-war years, the aim of successive Australian Governments was to ensure that nothing changed on the island of NG as a whole. The revival of a German threat was still seen as a possibility, as demonstrated by resistance to British suggestions that the return of northeast NG to Germany be a part of the program of appeasement,15 but the encroachment of Japanese interests in the Pacific was increasingly seen as the major problem. As with the Germans before, the

9 See Verrier, op.cit., pp. 9-12.
12 Official historian S. S. Mackenzie represented Australian thinking of the time when he wrote: “When...on the 4th of August, 1914, the nations woke to war, the German possessions in the Pacific became at once factors of great strategic importance. A powerful German fleet was in that ocean; it had bases and coaling facilities...with which it could communicate by wireless. As long as it remained in the Pacific and could maintain communication with its bases...it was obvious that the position was one fraught with endless possibilities for Australia and New Zealand. It was inevitable that those countries should be involved in operations against the German possessions.” See S. S. Mackenzie, The Australians at Rabaul: the Capture and Administration of the German Possessions in the Southern Pacific, St Lucia, 1987 (first printed 1927), p. 5.
14 ibid., p. 28.
Australians did not want a possible enemy to dominate the islands close to the mainland, so they attempted to prevent the growth of Japanese influence in these areas. In fact, by the late 1930s, Australians had been reinforced in their belief that the string of islands to their immediate north were the country's natural - and necessary - sphere of influence.

The widely accepted 'truths' about NG were reinforced by the events of the Second World War. The occupation of parts of the island by the Japanese, and the bombing of Darwin, was seen as proving the previously untested belief that control of NG by an enemy in war would gravely threaten the security of the continent itself. Similarly, the defeat of Japanese forces on the Kododa Trail and elsewhere was taken as showing that NG was a buffer area where an enemy could be met and repelled offshore. Under the impetus of these elements of conventional wisdom, the main tenet of Australia's traditional attitude to the island was strengthened; New Guinea had to be denied to any nation that might become hostile. Before 1942 this was a strongly held conviction, but in the post-War period it became - for the vast majority of Australians - an incontrovertible 'lesson' akin to that of Munich 1938.

Thus, in asserting in his statement to Cabinet that WNG was strategically vital to the defence of the country, Spender was hardly taking a revolutionary step. He was merely speaking in a manner consistent with the beliefs of most Australians, including his party colleagues. However, Spender raised two issues in connection with this strategic concern that had played no role in past government policy. "Australia", he asserted, "cannot passively await the outcome of negotiations, and should point out to both parties our direct strategic interests in the future administration of Dutch New Guinea." In the next sentence he added that "it is generally known we would oppose transfer to the Republic". In essence, Spender was underlining differences with Labor as to, firstly, the interpretation of the principle of keeping WNG 'friendly' and, secondly, over the best tactics for upholding the principle. In other words, Labor had not formally distinguished Indonesia as a potentially 'unfriendly' power - or as a country possibly dominated by an 'unfriendly' (most likely, communist) power - so it had not sought to guarantee Indonesian exclusion from the island. This was perhaps because of a

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16 See Colonel W. R. Hodgson (Secretary, DEA) to M. L. Shepherd (Secretary, Australian Department of Defence), 29 September 1937, and L. Murphy (Australian Trade Commissioner in Japan) to J. F. Murphy (Secretary, Australian Department of Commerce), 6 October 1937, in ibid., Vol. 1, 1937-38, p. 200 and pp. 234-35 respectively.

17 In acknowledging Spender's influence on the formation of Liberal WNG policy, it is necessary to recognize that he took initiative within the context of widespread agreement in the Party and among the public as to what the outlines of WNG policy should be. Verrier, op.cit., pp. 161-71, ascribes more
presumption that the Netherlands would exert an influence on Indonesian foreign and defence policies via the Union relationship, but the point is that Labor leaders saw Australian interests in NG as being given some protection by ensuring negotiations over WNG were conducted between the Dutch and the Indonesians alone. Spender was convinced this position was naïve and dangerous, and he sought a policy that was both active and biased against the Indonesians.

Spender's suspicions surrounding the future of the new Indonesian state were shared by other Ministers, and a majority in the public service and electorate. Though there was some sympathy for the aspirations of nationalist leaders, many viewed them as quislings of the Japanese – and they were highly distrusted as a result. The ability of these leaders as nation-builders and administrators was also questioned, which, coupled with the knowledge that Indonesia was fragile socially and economically, led to the belief that the country might well soon fragment or descend into chaos. This would leave it vulnerable to outside communist domination. Racial factors also played a part, and not only in terms of judgements of Indonesian 'character' and ability. Aroused by anti-colonial awakenings in Asia generally, many Australians did not want to see a 'white' administration replaced by a 'coloured' one in WNG. Psychologically, this would be unpalatable, as an Asian nation would, for the first time, share a land border with Australian territory. In other words, Australians had been able to live in Asia without 'touching it', so to speak, and they did not want to feel the full force of what was perhaps an historical aberration – that is, the establishment in 1788 of an Anglo-Saxon settlement in a region dominated by millions of a different race.

In designating the Indonesians as potentially unfriendly and, or, weak, Spender was therefore again not acting radically. Nevertheless, this position was not without problems because the Indonesians were determined to secure WNG. The Irian Barat issue was increasingly being seen in Indonesia as a last struggle against their former imperial overlords. Though there were differences amongst Indonesians as to the intensity of their feelings on this issue – and also divergences over tactics – almost all

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18 Chifley was still holding to this position in March 1950. See his comments in the House, 23 March 1950, in Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (Representatives) (hereafter Parliamentary Debates), Vol. 206, p. 1176. The Dutch-Indonesian Union was established in 1949 as a symbol of ongoing cooperation and consultation between the two countries. See H. Feith, The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia, New York, 1962, p. 14.

19 Irian Barat and West Irian (or the abbreviation 'Irian') were the two most commonly used Indonesian terms for WNG. For an Indonesian account in English of the Irian campaign, see A. Agung, Twenty Years Indonesian Foreign Policy 1945-1965, The Hague, 1973.
were united in the claim that Irian should be ‘returned’ to the Republic.\textsuperscript{20} In addition, it was those most fanatical (and less likely to use conventional diplomatic methods) that were exerting the most influence on Indonesian policy. In fact, the Cabinet of Mohammed Hatta – and later that of Mohammed Natsir – felt obliged to support the claim, not so much through genuine conviction, but because those of a more extreme bent had established a climate in which this had become politically necessary.\textsuperscript{21} President Achmed Sukarno was an important figure in the radicalization of the politics of the Irian campaign. He believed fervently in the moral strength of Indonesia’s claim, and viewed himself as being more in the artist-revolutionary mould,\textsuperscript{22} as opposed to those such as Hatta, who had a greater interest in the practicalities of administration. Consequently, Sukarno used his position – and his undoubted gifts as an orator – to agitate repeatedly in public for the transfer of WNG. Also, his statements were commonly more militant than those of Indonesian Cabinet members. On 28 December 1949, a day after Indonesia gained official independence from the Dutch, Sukarno had announced that “the next target to struggle for was the incorporation of West New Guinea into the new Republic of Indonesia”.\textsuperscript{23} Such methods and expressions were to be continually employed by the President in ensuring a revolutionary Irian campaign stayed at the forefront of national debate.

The obvious alternative to Indonesian control over WNG, that of continued Netherlands sovereignty, likewise posed difficulties for the Australians. The Dutch faced diplomatic isolation and domestic political turmoil over a remote and economically unrewarding territory. With the demise of the Netherlands East Indies, the focus of Dutch foreign policy was firmly on western Europe, and particularly the fledgling North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The maintenance of a presence in WNG was thus something of an anomaly, and one that the Dutch Government would be tempted to end if it became too expensive or brought the Netherlands into conflict with its ostensibly anti-colonial NATO ally – the United States. At home, a powerful

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{20}Feith, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 158-59. The degree of natural interest taken in Irian by Indonesians below the political elite is a matter of contention. Most academic commentators have argued that the majority of Indonesians felt cheated by the Dutch over Irian (see, for example, J. D. Legge, \textit{Sukarno: A Political Biography}, London, 1972, p. 248). Others, particularly members of the diplomatic corps in Jakarta during the 1950s, have claimed that the issue was artificially stimulated by President Sukarno (interview with Sir Walter Crocker, October 1998 (exact day unknown)).  
\textsuperscript{21}Feith, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 158, for this information on Mohammed Natsir’s Cabinet. Regarding Mohammed Hatta (Indonesian Prime Minister, December 1949-August 1950), Hugh Gilchrist (Australian \textit{Charge d'affaires} in Jakarta, February-December 1952) has claimed that Hatta was personally not particularly interested in the WNG question. Interview with Gilchrist, 4 May 1999. 
\textsuperscript{22}See quotations from Sukarno’s speeches, in which he refers to his nature as artist and revolutionary, in B. Grant, \textit{Indonesia}, Melbourne, 1966, pp. 38,40.  
\textsuperscript{23}Cited in Phelps, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 29.}
lobby group with business interests in Indonesia saw the retention of WNG as an obstacle to the reconstruction of Netherlands-Indonesian relations and the protection of Dutch assets. A growth in the influence of this faction would bring with it potential for an about-turn in the policy of retaining WNG. Furthermore, a decline in the feelings of sentimentality and bitterness – seemingly the main forces behind the general determination to retain the territory – contained similar possibilities. Added to all this, there existed the chance that a new government less sympathetic to a token empire – such as one dominated by the Dutch Labour Party – could come to power.24

The difficulties associated with Dutch and Indonesian policy were not ignored by Spender in the 8 February meeting. He noted that Indonesian leaders had claimed that WNG should be part of Indonesia, and he also drew attention to the danger that the Netherlands, in spite of its apparent willingness to defy Indonesian demands, “might see little point in maintaining New Guinea as an Independent colony” owing to the costs of development, defence and administration. West New Guinea would “for many years...be a liability rather than an asset.”25 Another menace perceived by Spender was the chance of a compromise between the Netherlands and Indonesia. He was, he said, concerned about the possibility of a combined Dutch-Asian administration of the western part of the island.26

In the light of this assessment, two conclusions were drawn. Firstly, Australia should not only support the Dutch, but make sure they did nothing against Australia’s interests. Spender proposed sending a note to the Dutch Government, informing it of these interests and asking to be kept fully informed. Secondly, if the Dutch contemplated a change in WNG’s status, “they should give consideration to an arrangement by which Australia could share with them the obligations of development and defence, for example, a bilateral agreement or even a joint trusteeship arrangement.” Thus, Indonesian demands and Dutch vulnerability were accounted for. The essence of the Minister’s plan was that the nullification of these dangerous elements could be achieved via a vigorous defence of the status quo and, if this failed, through the development of a cooperative Dutch-Australian relationship. The

24 The most comprehensive analysis in English of the WNG issue in Dutch policy and politics may be found in A. Lijphart, The Trauma of Decolonization: The Dutch and West New Guinea, New Haven, 1966.
25 Note by Spender for Cabinet presentation, 7 February 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA. In the context, it appears that the comment describing WNG as a “liability” is meant in a political, rather than economic, sense.
26 These fears were at this point prompted by reports that General Douglas Macarthur (Supreme Commander for Allied Powers in Japan) was pressing for the use of WNG as a destination for surplus Japanese population (see loc.cit.). Although this particular issue was a short-lived, the spectre of joint Indonesian-Dutch control soon created similar concerns.
underlying assumption of this was that given a firm resolution on the part of the Netherlands and Australian Governments, Indonesian opinion would become largely irrelevant – Jakarta would simply not have the power or influence to enforce its views, and it lacked the will to pursue its claim over time. Moreover, Spender apparently believed any resultant Indonesian bitterness would be of little long-term significance.27

All the ideas put forward by the Minister evoked strong support from Cabinet. Spender was given permission to inform the Dutch Government “of Australia’s vital interest” in WNG, and to suggest “that Australia was willing to play a more positive role in this matter than hitherto.”28 This decision – made within what was effectively the first month of power – highlighted the critical place that WNG occupied in the thinking of the new Liberal Government. Not only was such a move geared towards an active role in the dispute, Cabinet had taken its stand before America or Britain had developed a clear position in the matter. As events made apparent, Australian planning was, at this point, more advanced than that of the Dutch themselves. This is not to say that Australian policy had crystallized. Certainly, the Australians were forced to make changes during the next 12 months, but the basic framework of Liberal policy until 1959 was established at this early stage: for the sake of Australian security, Indonesia had to be kept out of WNG, and someone ‘friendly’ kept in.

II

This objective, its logic (security), and the means of its pursuit (active involvement), reveal important aspects of Australian self-perception with regard to part of SEA – namely Indonesia. The first two show recognition of potential Australian vulnerability to the Republic.29 It was possible that Australia could in future be weak relative to its new neighbour. This, however, was not the same as fear. Australia was not afraid of Indonesia (in the way that Nancy Viviani, for example, has argued).30 It was, rather, forcefully confident in its attitude to Jakarta, believing it was able, in the face of a fervent Indonesian campaign, and without the direct aid of the US and UK, to prevent Indonesian penetration of Melanesia. To be sure, the Government’s goal referred to

28 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 7-8 February 1950, in A4638/XM1, NAA.
29 These two aspects are also illuminating in terms of Australia’s self-image regarding the rest of SEA, and are elucidated in this context later in the chapter.
30 Viviani, op.cit., p. 170, by contending that the Government failed to make a “cool assessment” of Indonesia’s ability and intentions regarding ENG, implies that Australia was irrationally alarmed by the Indonesian claim.
above, combined with its means, demonstrates the conviction that Australia was a superior power to Indonesia.

Thus, Australia’s attitude to SEA was not entirely characterized by timidity, followed by direct dependence on outside forces. Instead, Australia viewed itself as the preeminent power in the area roughly south of Singapore, and as the effective colonial power of the Southwest Pacific. It consequently behaved in a manner it saw as befitting such degrees of ‘imperial’ authority – aggressively and relatively independently asserting its predominance in the wider area through defence of its immediate Pacific sphere of influence east of the WNG-Papua and New Guinea (PNG) border, and maintenance of its strategic buffer zone in WNG. The reality of such self-assurance and autonomy was to be clearly illustrated as the Government’s active campaign gained momentum.

As an aside, it is important to stress the validity of using Australian Government policy on WNG in making observations on ‘Australia’s’ perception of itself in relation to SEA, Britain, and the US. As noted, the Cabinet decisions of February aligned with public sentiment concerning Indonesia’s unreliability and the sanctity of both sides of NG. This is clear in Gallup Polls of February and May 1950, in which an average of 49.9% of those with an opinion preferred Australia to govern DNG, whilst 25.2% favoured the Netherlands, and 19% the United Nations (UN). Only 5.7% believed Indonesia should rule the territory. In terms of the Australian public service, the Department of Defence was revealed later in the year to be dominated by those (as the Department of External Affairs (DEA) was) disposed to supporting Liberal policy. A report by the Joint Planning Committee (JPC) – later “noted” by the Defence Committee (DC), and endorsed by the Secretary of Defence – stressed that WNG was “strategically important”, and that “a change of control...from the Netherlands to...Indonesia would not be in the interests of Australian defence.”

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31 These figures are adapted from Gallup Poll results cited in D. Aitkin and E. P. Wolfers, ‘Australian Attitudes Towards the Papua New Guinea Area Since World War II’, Australian Outlook, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1973, p. 204.

32 Joint Planning Committee (JPC) Report No. 41/1950, “Strategic Significance of Dutch New Guinea”, in A5954/1, 1682/13, NAA. A report by the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) entitled “An Estimate of the Capacity of Indonesia to Carry Out an Attack on Dutch New Guinea” also supported the Cabinet notion that Australia could irritate the Indonesians without incurring substantial military risks. See JIC appreciation No. 7/1950, 20 December 1950, in A1838/269, TS696/3/2, Pt 1, NAA.
In the first move of the active policy phase, Spender sent a note to P. E. Teppema, the Dutch Minister in Canberra, stressing that Australia had “vital strategic interests in Dutch New Guinea”, and “did not regard [it] as forming part of Indonesia.” Information regarding Netherlands-Indonesian negotiations was also requested, and Spender suggested that Australia and the Netherlands exchange views – perhaps on the problems of administration, development and defence. Concerning Indonesia, Spender proposed “to make quite clear to the authorities in...Indonesia that it regards itself as directly concerned in the determination of the future administration of Dutch New Guinea.” This was a bold move, and one premised not only on opposition to Indonesian claims, but also on the idea that close ties with Indonesia would be best achieved by making the Australian position “quite clear from the outset rather than allow[ing] an atmosphere of doubt and mistrust to enter into our relations.”

United States and British representatives were handed copies of the note to the Dutch soon after 8 February, and asked to comment. These moves forced the British, for the first time, to articulate their views to the Liberal Government; the threat of Australian intervention raised serious problems for the United Kingdom. Foremost in Foreign Office (FO) thinking was the potential danger to British Far Eastern interests. The Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) telegraphed the High Commissioner in Canberra:

The close liaison between Indonesia and India should...be taken into account. It is almost certain that the terms of any approach by Australia on the lines suggested would leak out, and this would have a most undesirable effect on Indian opinion and in other countries where there is much sympathy with Indonesian aspirations.

33 Spender to P. E. Teppema (Netherlands Ambassador to Australia), 8 February 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA. Cabinet had decided that “the terms of the letter [would]...be settled between the Min. E.A. and the Prime Minister” (see minutes of Cabinet meeting, 7-8 February, A4638, XM1, NAA), so it is possible that Menzies had some input in the changes to the letter between 7 and 8 February, although Spender seems to have overseen its final form; he instructed Burton to “prepare [the] letter...in accordance with draft attached as altered by me.” See Spender’s 8 February minute on note by Spender for Cabinet presentation, 7 February 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.

34 In an attempt to justify Australian involvement in the dispute, Spender commented that “we regard Dutch New Guinea as having much in common from both an ethnic, administrative and developmental point of view with our own territories of Papua and New Guinea.” Earlier he had stated: “Australia’s vital strategic interests in Dutch New Guinea...are, in fact, no less than Australia’s vital interests in Australian New Guinea and Papua.”

35 Note by Spender for Cabinet presentation, 7 February 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.

Though British policy underwent distinct changes over the next 12 years, remaining interests in Asia continued to exert a central influence on its character. Beyond this, the initial reaction in Whitehall was that the Dutch and Indonesians should be allowed to negotiate without interference. This position was remarkably similar to that of the Australian Labor Party in 1949, and it is likely that it reflected the views of British Labour Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevan.

The official British reply came through their Deputy High Commissioner in Canberra, Walter Garnett. Paraphrase three of his letter was a summary of the UK position, as had been communicated to External Affairs in October 1949, and to which the British said they still held. A preference for “the retention of Dutch control” was expressed, although it was made clear that the idea of a “long trusteeship does not appeal to us” and that “we feel that the subject is essentially one for settlement between the Dutch and Indonesians.” Fundamentally, the British desired that the dispute remain localized, and that nothing be done to further rock the boat as far as their own interests (particularly those in Malaya and Singapore) were concerned. This is not to say there was no regard for Australian interests in London; in a telegram from the CRO to the Embassy in Canberra, it was claimed that Australian anxieties were “fully appreciated”, and noted that Dutch attempts to overhaul administration in WNG indicated “they do not intend to yield easily to Indonesian pressure”.

Still, the traditional Labourite attitude regarding international dialogue, and an eye to self-interest in Asia – and both were complementary in this instance – were the dominant strains in UK policy at this time.

On 20 February, the Netherlands Government conveyed its reply to the Australian note. Although the Australian offer of support was referred to as “highly appreciated”, it is difficult to interpret Dutch comments as anything less than a tactful rebuff. Highlighting the great hope that existed in The Hague in the early years of a close relationship with Indonesia, Spender was informed that discussion on the WNG issue was due to take place at the first Netherlands-Indonesian Union Conference, and that “great importance is attached to avoid anything which might influence the harmonious atmosphere between the partners of the...Union.” More specifically, he was told “any immediate step in connection with the New Guinea problem undertaken by a

37 Walter Garnett (UK Deputy High Commissioner to Australia) to John Burton (Secretary, DEA), 17 February 1950, in A1838/283 TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
38 Telegram 124 from CRO to UK High Commissioner, 16 February 1950, in FO 371/8703, PRO.
39 Phelps, op. cit., p. 39, presents UK policy as being more sympathetic to the status quo at this point than in fact it was.
40 Teppema to Spender, 20 February 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, PRO.
third power will, it is believed, necessarily touch the Indonesian sentiments and may carry the risk that an objective approach to the problems at stake be frustrated.” Finally, the Australians were assured that “the Netherlands Government has no intention of taking decisive steps with regard to New Guinea in the near future.” Although the Dutch placed emphasis on the forthcoming negotiations, it is clear that they viewed any interference as inevitably disastrous in a tactical sense.41 It seems that at this point they were concerned with the issue only from the point of view of their own interests; little was made of the basis of Spender’s memorandum – Australia’s “vital strategic interests”.

Having raised the WNG issue verbally with Teppema on 10 February, Spender had already decided not to approach the Indonesians,42 and the official replies of the British and Dutch Governments must have greatly reinforced his sense of isolation. In fact, the Australians were probably shocked at the degree of opposition from two allies over an issue they believed was central to the country’s security. Nevertheless – and in a first explicit sign that Australia was prepared to pursue its interests in WNG alone if necessary – these events were apparently viewed as a tactical setback, rather than a reason to review Australian policy. Teppema’s note was acknowledged on 22 February, and Australia expressed an interest in the promise that the Netherlands “would revert to the contents of the Australian note in due course”.43 Yet, it is a reply to Garnett’s letter of 17 February that most graphically illustrates that, having been gently rebuffed, the Australians simply looked for different ways of pressing their original case. The Secretary of the DEA, John Burton, wrote:

the view of the United Kingdom authorities which you summarised is broadly in agreement with our own, except for a very important and even vital difference in emphasis...the Australian Government takes a definite view that there is little room for compromise in this matter because it is not merely that Dutch New Guinea is of “some importance to Pacific defence” but that it is in fact vital to our security. However, we might take up this question of emphasis at a later date when we know better the position between the Netherlands Government and the Indonesian authorities.44

41 According to British Ambassador to The Hague, Sir Philip Nichols, Dirk Stikker (Dutch Foreign Minister) was also afraid that disclosure of the Australian attitude would lead to an unfavourable public reaction in the Netherlands, along with the development of an intransigent stance regarding negotiations. See Nichols to R. H. Scott (Head, South East Asia Department, British Foreign Office (FO)), 21 February 1950, in FO 371/8703, PRO.
42 See Spender’s minute to Burton on Garnett’s reply of 17 February, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
43 Burton to Teppema, 22 February 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
44 Burton to Garnett, 24 February 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA. According to one contemporary, Burton was, as H. V. Evatt’s (former Australian Minister for External Affairs) protégé, probably in a “lame duck situation”, and “treading lightly”, with Spender’s assumption of the External Affairs portfolio (interview with Pierre Hutton (in 1950, a cadet in the DEA), 26 May 1998), but they do not seem to have had any reason to disagree over WNG. There may even have been a strange rapport between them on the issue. Burton, like Evatt, had always enjoyed needling the US and UK, and Spender certainly had some vigorous exchanges with both countries over the following months.
The gist of Spender and Burton’s thinking at this stage seems to have been that Australia should try to find common ground with Britain and the Netherlands if possible – without letting go of the Cabinet decisions of February 8 – yet leave room for another push towards the plan proposed in the note to the Dutch if this proved necessary.

The Australian Government, awaiting clarification of the Netherlands-Indonesian interaction over WNG, did not communicate further with other governments during March or early April. This lull ended abruptly with the decision by Dutch and Indonesian representatives to establish a special commission, whose task it would be “to find a solution acceptable to both parties.” Spender immediately sent an exceptionally strong letter and aide memoire to Teppema. Horrified at the now real possibility of a Dutch-Indonesian compromise, Spender evidently believed it called for a hard-line response:

>a solution acceptable to both parties by implication must give some entry to Indonesia into Dutch New Guinea...the Australian Government cannot contemplate any entry, direct or indirect, by Indonesia into Dutch territory.

In this context, Spender made it clear Australia would not baulk at moving toward an entirely independent policy on DNG. He said “we feel compelled...to state our views clearly to the Republican authorities, at least stating that we are informing the Netherlands Government of claims in respect of Dutch New Guinea, and of the fact that we believe the Netherlands should feel free to negotiate with us at this stage.”

The belligerent tones and independent claims of the letter were expanded in the extraordinary aide memoire, in which Spender set out the alternatives to a compromise with Jakarta. After reiterating the argument that agreement with Indonesia would result in the latter gaining some administrative control, Spender emphasized the difficulties that the Dutch would have in retaining WNG. He then attempted to lay down Australia’s credentials as an interested party (principally by drawing attention to

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45 This comment refers to secret dialogue, for Spender did make a public statement in Parliament on 9 March on New Guinea. However, his message would have contained no revelations for other protagonists. He stated that “the island areas immediately adjacent to Australia...are, as experience has shown, our last ring of defence against aggression, and Australia must be vitally concerned with whatever changes take place in them. It is not to be assumed by anyone that should fundamental changes take place in any of these areas, Australia would adopt a purely passive role. I have in mind particularly, but not exclusively, New Guinea, which is an absolutely essential link in the chain of Australian defence.” Statement by Spender, 9 March 1950, in Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 206, pp. 632-33.

46 Spender to Teppema (with aide memoire), 20 April 1950, in A1838/283, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA. Phelps, op.cit., p. 33, mistakenly ascribes Spender’s action to the failure of a first meeting between Dutch and Indonesia. Indeed, Phelps’ presentation of Australian policy during this early period suffers from a lack of attention to chronological detail; Canberra’s activities are portrayed in a more arbitrary light than is warranted.

47 Spender to Teppema, 20 April 1950, in A1838/283, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
Australian rule in Papua and New Guinea). Following this, a dramatic conclusion was drawn:

If the Netherlands agrees with our judgements set out above and does not feel it can, from the point of view of world opinion or the point of view of the problems of administration, permanently maintain its position, then we would prefer that it should relinquish completely its interests to Australia on terms to be determined, so that this territory could be administered along with the Territory of Papua and the Trust Territory of New Guinea.

This was more than mere talk. John Hood, the new Australian Ambassador in Jakarta, was asked to deliver (by 1 May) a letter articulating Australia’s claim to be “the sole administrator or at least part administrator of Dutch New Guinea as trustee or otherwise.”

The British and Americans were forwarded copies of the communication to Hood, and they responded swiftly. Both had viewed the earlier assertion of Australian interest in negotiations as a nuisance, but the real chance of a claim to WNG generated positive alarm in London and Washington. The US memorandum in reply opened by stressing that they were “highly concerned” by the intended Australian intervention, and that a “frank statement of the United States view” was needed. The American argument consisted of half a dozen points, but the basis of it was that although the US preferred a continued Dutch presence in the form of a trusteeship, neither this, nor Australian involvement, would be likely to meet with world approval outside or within a United Nations framework. New initiatives could also upset the Indonesians, thus jeopardizing the stability of the area. In conclusion, the Americans said that “the Government of the United States considers that...Indonesia and the Netherlands should be permitted to exhaust all the possibilities of a workable solution through bilateral negotiations before consideration is given to other methods of solving the problem.” The Americans, to this point, had not given the WNG problem a great deal of thought, but their initial reaction appears to have been to avoid provoking either the Indonesian

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48 Burton to John Hood (Australian Ambassador to Indonesia), with attached aide memoire, 21 April 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
49 Aide memoire by US Government. 28 April 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA. There was a clear feeling among certain elements of the US State Department that Australian policy was extreme. In colourful language, Selden Chapin (US Ambassador to the Netherlands) commented to Secretary of State Dean Acheson that “[I] Feel sure that [the] Dutch are enjoying many sardonic if slightly melancholy laughs at [the] latest Australian move which makes [Dutch anti-revolutionary Raymond] Westerling not to speak of ultra Dutch reactionaries look like Salvation Army lasses” (telegram 517 from Chapin to Acheson, 1 May 1950, 756C.00/5-150, Box 3747, RG 59, Department of State Decimal File (hereafter abbreviated as DF) 1950-54, Archives II, Maryland, USA (hereafter A2)). Similarly, William B. Lacy (Director, State Department Office of Southeast Asian Affairs) told Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk that “Spender, in delivering the note [to the Dutch Ambassador in Canberra] used language which led our Embassy to believe that the Australians were thinking in terms even of the use of armed force if necessary to prevent the entrance of Indonesians into Netherlands New Guinea” (Lacy to Rusk, 3 May 1950, 756C.00/5-350, Box 3747, RG 59, DF 1950-54, A2).
leadership, among whom they hoped to encourage sympathy towards the West, or the Dutch, who were simultaneously important NATO partners, and smarting over the US role in Indonesian independence.

The basic themes of the British *communique* were similar to that of the Americans.\(^5\) It was curtly stated that “the Australian Government at present have [sic] no standing and are [sic] likely to be rebuffed by both the Netherlands and Indonesian Governments.” Furthermore – and also indicative of the division between the perspectives of Australia and the Allies on this issue – there were fears that the note to Indonesia might “increase their suspicions regarding Western motives in South East Asia”. The UK advised that the delivery of the note be delayed at least until the reply of the Netherlands Government was received.\(^5\)

Unknown to the British and Americans, the second Australian retreat had, in fact, already begun. Hood had been cabled on 29 April and told that “in view of the strong representations of the U.S. and U.K. it has been decided to withhold presentation of [the] aide memoire until Netherlands observation[s] [are] received.”\(^5\) Hood was also asked for his assessment of the situation, because a decision had to be made as to whether to go ahead with the note in spite of the British and American reaction. On the other hand, it was also admitted that a solution such as a Netherlands trusteeship might eventually be acceptable if the US “made some firm undertakings regarding maintenance of the position in the light of world opinion and development and defence

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50 Garnett to Burton, 29 April 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.

51 British comment behind the scenes is illuminating regarding general perceptions of Australian WNG policy, and also the motivations behind their own position. In a memorandum for British Foreign Secretary Earnest Bevan, Scott had written that “The Australian action in this matter (which has been taken in the case of the Dutch without consultation with us) is extremely unfortunate and may have most dangerous consequences...the Australians have acted much too hastily” (Scott to Bevan, 27 April 1950, in FO 371/8703, PRO.) In an attached minute, he added: “It is recommended that we should dissuade the Australian Government from addressing the proposed note to the Indonesian Government....It is in our interest that the present status of Dutch New Guinea should remain unchanged, both on strategic grounds and because a change might serve as a pretext for further Indonesian claims to British and Australian territories in that area....We do not however consider that this interest is sufficient to justify exerting pressure upon the Indonesian Government....Our objection to the present Australian approach is based upon the harm which it will do to Western prestige in South East Asia. The only arguments used are strategic; the whole note is inspired by a self-interest which contrasts most unfortunately with previous expressions of Australian sympathy for Indonesian aspirations and its only effect can be to reinforce the suspicions of the countries in South East Asia that our policy there is based on nothing but our own strategic interests.” These were dominant views in the Foreign Office, and they demonstrate a commitment to British and Western interests in SEA over and above the acknowledged value of a Dutch presence in WNG. Hinted at here is also a divergence of opinion with the British Colonial Office (CO). The latter advocated active support of the Dutch (see minute by H. B. C. Keeble (Indonesia desk, FO), 21 April 1950, in FO 371/8703, PRO), but it is clear from the repeated implementation of FO recommendations that the CO did not have the same influence at this point. UK policy, therefore, was one in which sympathy for Australia continued to be subsumed by concerns for the impact of Asian opinion on their own assets in the area. In so far as these remained useful in American eyes, they could also be justifiably represented as Western interests.

52 Cablegram for Hood, 29 April 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/12, Pt 1, NAA.
of the territory.” This was a significant aside. For the first time, consideration was being given to the idea that, if a change in the status of the territory did occur, direct Australian involvement in its administration might not be necessary. This shift was not simply a direct result of Australia’s diplomatic isolation. Britain and America would have had little impact on Spender if none of their comments had complemented Australian strategic concerns. However, the US claim that it would ideally favour continued Dutch control struck a chord with him. If the Americans could throw their full weight behind a Netherlands trusteeship, the Dutch would be strengthened, Indonesia possibly silenced, and Australia’s interests reconciled with those of the Western powers. Nonetheless, this was at best a remote possibility. In the meantime, more immediate concerns had to be dealt with; namely, how to prevent a Dutch-Indonesian compromise in spite of the fact that Australia was rapidly becoming isolated in connection with WNG.

It was here that John Burton put forward some suggestions. In a letter to Spender on 1 May, the Secretary advised that the US, the UK, and the Netherlands be informed

that there are about two weeks to elapse before formal presentation of the Note, and [that they] have that opportunity to come back with constructive proposals or useful assurances. In the absence of anything of that nature, we can completely justify the Note being presented formally.53

This was a rather cunning attempt to regain the moral high ground, whilst leaving open the slim possibility that one of the governments might put something forward that might suit Australia. Burton’s ideas were, he claimed, based on Hood’s suggestions,54 but he was in fact misrepresenting the latter. Hood had actually stated that he was “convinced that it would be a mistake at this stage to disclose our interest to the Indonesian Government in a manner proposed in the aide memoire...just when the proper time would come is hard just now to say; but in my opinion it is not at the moment.”55 It is interesting that one of the first words of caution evident in Australian circles was deliberately distorted, and therefore effectively ignored. Still, Burton’s ideas were the ones that Spender wanted to hear. Notes to the US, the UK, and the Netherlands on 3 May essentially repeated (with some additions) the drafts submitted by Burton.56 All of them were written in a cooperative tone, but the design behind them – as expressed by Burton above – was unmistakable.

53 Burton to Spender, 1 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
54 loc. cit.
55 Cablegram 166 from Hood, 30 April 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
56 See Burton’s drafts to the US and UK Governments, 1 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
At one level, the opening months of the active Liberal crusade showed, as the initial policy planning stage had, that Australia approached its relations with Indonesia confident in its supremacy. Indonesia, while the only foreseeable direct threat to Australia's hegemony in the SW Pacific, was also viewed as subject in a political and military - though not colonial - sense. The note Hood was instructed to deliver evinced no fear that the Republic would be able to call upon overwhelming diplomatic aid or military muscle to counter Australia's provocative call to be "the sole administrator or at least part administrator of Dutch New Guinea as trustee or otherwise."\(^{57}\)

The main theme of the early active period, nevertheless, was the ramifications of such self-perceived superiority in respect to the US and UK. As alluded to earlier, the Australian Government, because it was not worried about Indonesia, did not feel the need to make itself dependent on the Americans or the British in its dealings with offshore SEA. After London's negative reaction to the original note to Teppema, Australia's retreat had only been provisional; there was a desire to keep in step with the British but, as Burton had suggested to Garnett, Australia was prepared to disregard this, depending on the situation following further definition of the Dutch position. Similarly, when the US and UK firmly rejected Spender's scheme for interjection in the event of a Dutch collapse, the Minister pulled back - but only momentarily in the hope that a concerted approach might be found or, more particularly, that the US might agree to a Dutch trusteeship. Notes to Washington and London made clear that Australia did not feel bound to stay its hand; a fortnight's grace was given, after which Indonesia would be formally notified that Australia would sue for sole control of WNG. Such behaviour hardly speaks of a Southeast Asian policy that can be invariably defined in terms of the immediate importance of relations with the US and UK.

This granted, it is imperative to point to the indirect significance of these two allies in Australia's self-appointed position as the predominant power south of Singapore. Just as Britain's place in the global world order after the Second World War (which included its status as a _de jure_ and, or, _de facto_ colonial power) was dependent on US might and an overlap of national interests, Australia's place as the power of offshore SEA was, the Menzies Government was convinced, contingent on Australia remaining the beneficiary of the same expediens (power and coinciding interests) in relation to both the British and the Americans. These needs had specific application to

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\(^{57}\) Burton to Hood, with attached _aide memoire_, 21 April 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
the region beyond that in which Australia had control – American and British assistance was seen as vital in containing China and communism on mainland SEA, and it was on these questions that Australia eagerly engaged in the politics of dependency – yet they were indirectly pertinent to the Indonesia-SW Pacific area because the loss of SEA, and the withdrawal of the US and UK, would, it was thought, spell an end to Australia’s influence and, perhaps, its very existence. These ideas explain Spender’s willingness to inform the British and Americans of Australian plans, and to seek consensus in light of their protestations; it was foolish for Australia, in pursuing its interests in one particular area, to damage needlessly those in other and essential areas. At the same time, it should be noted that the Australian Government did not think such damage, if deliberately incurred, would be serious enough to undermine the value of an independent policy in its ‘own’ area. Put differently, Australian Government policies in this domain were only marginally affected by recognition of the particular (for mainland SEA) or indirect generic importance of alliance with the US and Britain. Australian foreign policies in SEA, in so far as they related to feelings about certain Asian nations, and to the place of the UK and US, closely mirrored distinctions of a geo-strategic nature.58

58 By focussing on the DEA, Chauvel has asserted Australians tended to view their “neighbourhood” in terms of a South Pacific region and Southeast Asian area – the former being friendly, and the other dangerous, with WNG occupying an “ambiguous” place as part of both. (See Chauvel, ‘The emergence of the West New Guinea dispute’ in Lowe, op.cit., pp. 55-59). Using a policy-international relations perspective, it seems Australian perceptions were more multifaceted. The area to the continent’s north was divided into four: imminently dangerous mainland SEA; and (all bracketed under Australian predominance) possibly dangerous, but weak, Indonesia; the ‘buffer’ of WNG; the ‘immediate’ sphere of influence east of that. Because of Indonesia’s weakness, the Republic was not truly dangerous in the way that the rest of SEA was, and nor did WNG have an ambiguous status (apart from in theory, whereby Australia had allowed Indonesia to take over the territory).
Chapter 2: The Refinement of Australian policy, May-August 1950

Probably much to the surprise of Spender and Burton, the Dutch did reply positively on 5 May. The key points in the letter (and attached *aide memoire*) were that the Netherlands had decided that it wanted to retain WNG, and that the establishment of the Netherlands-Indonesian Commission did not justify the conclusion that compromise was therefore inevitable. In a minute to Burton, Spender commented:

> The reply is of great importance to us. For the first time we have a clear statement of Netherlands policy. [sic] our note to them has borne fruit. The reasonable nature of the note delivered by Teppema will be maintained by us.

The clarity of the Netherlands reply was enlightening, and it must have been a relief to hear that the Indonesians would not be granted access to WNG in the near future. However, this new stance also created problems. It did not guarantee Indonesia’s exclusion from the island because, if deadlock between the Dutch and Indonesians did occur, the question was likely (if events were allowed to run their natural course) to go before the UN where the outcome was unpredictable. Moreover, the Dutch might weaken later. Finally, the articulation of positive Dutch aims had weakened the case for Australian interference; the success of Burton’s tactic of regaining the moral high ground had been dependent upon a negative or non-committal answer.

The remainder of Spender's minute, which detailed the matters that he believed now needed consideration, addressed these concerns. On the UN, he focussed on the need to devise tactics that would prevent the matter going before the Security Council. Regarding the difficulties of political and legal legitimacy posed for Australian control by the Dutch riposte, and by the chance of Dutch vacillation, Spender reverted to his original 8 February plan of again looking towards some form of Dutch presence in WNG, whilst always guarding “Australia’s vital interests”. In practical terms, his minute suggested exploring a range of governmental alternatives for WNG that would hinge on Dutch involvement, whilst being careful to avoid “variants in ultimate solutions that might prejudice Australia’s vital interests.” It is also clear he still thought

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1 Minute by Spender, 7 May 1950, on note by Burton to Spender, 5 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA. There is evidence that Spender was correct in viewing the Dutch response as a “fruit” of Australian activity. Two *aide memoire* related to WNG were handed from the Dutch to the Americans on 4 May, one of which was, in part, geared towards distancing themselves from the Australian attitude. The other stated that “The Netherlands Cabinet, having once more thoroughly examined this [WNG] problem, has reached the conclusion that Western New Guinea should remain under Netherlands authority”, and requested US support for this position. (See 756C.005-450, Box 3747, RG 59, DF 1950-54, A2). The timing of this Cabinet decision strongly suggests that the Australian *demarche* had some influence.
the option of creating a precedent for Australia's entry into the dispute as a party principal – by delivering the note to the Indonesians – was worth further consideration.

Consistent with these notions, Spender tried to test Dutch resolve, and manipulate them into taking an even stronger stand. On 10 May he sent a letter to Teppema telling him that although Australia was in general agreement with the Netherlands note of 5 May, the problem of what would happen if the issue came before the Security Council had not been dealt with. It was, Spender continued, because this seemed likely, and that without a third claimant to WNG the Council would feel obliged to cede the territory to Indonesia, that Australia would present a note to the Indonesians and press its claims before the UN.2 This was, of course, said 'tongue in cheek', for Spender's minute had shown that no definite decision on the note had been made, and that he was determined WNG would not go before the Security Council. Rather, he wanted to probe Dutch fortitude concerning immediate negotiations with the Indonesians, and provoke a development of earlier expressions of intransigence.

The first point of the Netherlands' rejoinder would not have been a source of great comfort:

Your note of May 10 is based on the assumption that the consultation which is to be affected between the Governments of the Netherlands and Indonesia will not lead to a positive result and that consequently this problem will be referred to the Security Council. The Netherlands Government cannot at the outset assume this and considers the solution of this issue a matter between the two Union partners.3

It is easy to imagine Spender becoming agitated at this point, but he would have felt more at ease with the final paragraph of the Dutch demarche. In fact, he could hardly have hoped for better, for the tone of this passage was entirely uncompromising:

The Australian Government apparently assumes that a change in the status of New Guinea will be contemplated and eventually will be affected either voluntarily by the Netherlands or in virtue of a decision by the Security Council in which case the claims of third parties would then be considered on their merits. As against this the Netherlands Government can give the assurance that it does not contemplate the cession of Sovereignty over New Guinea. My Government would most strongly oppose any international effort calculated to press it for the adoption of a course which the Netherlands Government would not deem to be in accordance with the interests of the territory concerned and of the Netherlands itself.

Two days later Spender chose not to send (at least for the time being) the note to the Indonesians,4 for the Dutch communiqué had strengthened the hopes stimulated by their letter of 5 May. Certainly, assessments of the Dutch position had been a central external

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2 Spender to Teppema, 10 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
3 Teppema to Spender, 17 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
4 See Spender's minute of 21 May 1950, on cablegram 197 from Hood, 19 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA. No record was made at the time of this resolution.
determinant of Australian policy, so it is unlikely that the re-statement of the UK and US stance, which had come a few days earlier, had a significant influence.5

As the Dutch evinced signs of resistance, the Indonesians attempted to show the Australian Government the gravity with which they would view any interference by Canberra on Irian. In a cablegram from Jakarta, Hood explained that L. N. Palar, head of the Indonesian delegation to the UN, had visited him on behalf of Hatta.6 Palar had made it clear that Indonesia was determined that WNG be included in the Republic, and that the other Southeast Asian states believed the Dutch should give up the territory. On top of this, he said that the Dutch themselves had agreed that if they abandoned WNG, it would automatically go to the Indonesians. These views were well known in Canberra, but it was Palar’s final comments that raised eyebrows:

if any other status were given to New Guinea, there would be irresistible political infiltration from Indonesia which would inevitably spread to Australian New Guinea. He was not enquiring about the present Australian attitude, but asked very earnestly that these considerations should be weighed for the sake of friendship that would in all other respects have a sound basis.

At the same time, President Sukarno had made a nation-wide broadcast, in which he said: “remember! West Irian must be returned to our fold! West Irian can be returned to our fold if we are united, West Irian will certainly be returned to our fold if we are united!”7

Spender was unsure how these new developments should affect Australia’s tactical policy on WNG, yet he was eager to display his Government’s disapproval of such bellicosity. Burton thus promptly cabled Hood, commenting that

Your last paragraph is most disturbing. We cannot find any previous report of this attitude being adopted. This and Sukarno’s public statement make it necessary for the Minister to state the viewpoint of the Government. It may be desirable to rest our case on a statement such as this rather than present a Note. However, at this stage the Minister is refraining from making a statement except to say you are being asked to return for consultation.8

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5 For British and American remarks, see James Marjoribanks (Official Secretary, UK High Commission, Canberra) to Burton, 13 May 1950, and W. A. Wynes (Assistant Secretary, DEA) to Burton, 16 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA. In addition to these representations, the Australian High Commissioner in New Delhi had warned that Jawaharlal Nehru (the Indian Prime Minister) was due to visit Indonesia, and that he might encourage them to reject an Australian advance if it were made while he was there. This may have had an influence on the decision not to send the note, but it can only have been a factor of secondary importance if it was one at all; if Nehru’s visit was the main reason for the shelving of the note, the Australians would have sent it immediately after his departure.

6 Cablegram 197 from Hood, 19 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.

7 Emphasis original. See extract of Speech in Cablegram 204 from Hood, 22 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.

8 Cablegram 179 from Burton to Hood, 22 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA. Burton’s comment with regard to the note – because it suggests serious consideration was still being given to its despatch – apparently discredits the idea that the attitude of the Dutch was the major factor in its postponement, and supports the notion that Nehru’s visit was the cause. A number of things may be said in response to this. The first is that consideration of backing the Dutch had involved keeping open the option of pursuing an independent policy and therefore sending the note; Burton may have been saying
Following on, Spender sent a message to Alan Watt, the Acting Secretary of External Affairs, asking him whether a statement to Parliament was necessary and, if so, what should be contained in it. Watt recommended a cautious approach. He noted that the recall of Hood had made known the Australian view by implication and believed that “this action is still the most effective way of expressing Australia’s view without stating it in detail in some irrevocable form.” Watt also went beyond the immediate requests that Spender had made, and commented on wider issues vis-à-vis the dispute. He pointed out that the US, whose support was vital to Australia in the Pacific, had made clear its position – a position also supported by the British – and he then counselled “the most careful consideration of further Australian policy on this matter by Cabinet itself after Hood returns.” In his opinion, the determination of the Dutch to retain sovereignty, and the fact that they could expect support from influential quarters, was “an important new factor” that had arisen since Hood was originally instructed to present the note to the Indonesians.

The thrust of Watt’s memorandum, then, was that nothing radical should be done without close thought, because certain costs were involved. It is important to notice, though, that the implied recommendation of turning to more circumspect methods was predicated on indications of Dutch fortitude rather than the opposition of the US, the UK, and Indonesia. In other words, it would hardly be worth engendering ill-feeling if the Dutch could be used to achieve Australian purposes.

Spender, who was of course keen to minimize strain where possible, followed Watt’s advice on the immediate issue, and declined to present a public statement straight away. However, after briefing Cabinet in full on developments in connection with WNG since February, he made a strong speech in the House of Representatives on 8 June. After a short review of the history of the dispute and Australian policy,

that a statement, even if it was decided that long-term Dutch administration was not possible, might be the only thing that the Australian Government could now forward in view of the Indonesian attitude. The other side of the coin is that Burton appears to have misinterpreted Spender’s ideas at times. For example, on 23 May, Alan Watt (Acting Secretary, DEA) contradicted Burton’s cable by claiming Hood’s recall had occurred so that Spender would not have to make a statement. Memorandum by Watt and unidentified officer, 23 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt I, NAA.

9 After the 15-20 May meeting of the British Commonwealth Consultative Committee on economic aid for Southeast Asia, Watt was informed by Spender that Burton had asked for six months leave without pay, to which Spender had replied that he would consequently be replaced. Following a period as Acting Secretary, Watt was officially appointed Secretary of the DEA on 19 June. See A. S. Watt, *Australian Diplomat: The Memoirs of Sir Alan Watt*, Sydney, 1972, pp.161-62.

10 Teleprinter message from Spender to Watt, 24 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt I, NAA.

11 Teleprinter message from Watt to Spender, 24 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.

12 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 7 June 1950, A4638/XM1, NAA.

Spender said that “it is our view that, should discussions between the Netherlands and Indonesia tend towards any arrangement which would alter the status of western New Guinea, the matter is no longer one merely for those two parties themselves.” He followed this with an interpretation of WNG’s strategic significance that contained most of the popular ‘truths’ regarding the island as a whole:

from the aspect of the security of Australia, the territory [of WNG] is naturally integrated with the rest of New Guinea and other adjacent island territories which experience has shown to be strategically vital to our defence. Australians who fought along the Kokoda Trail and elsewhere in the defence of this country and its people will need no reminder of this; nor will those who were, by their efforts saved from the devastation and misery which would have descended upon our country had the Japanese not been halted when within only a few miles of Port Moresby. We cannot alter our geography which for all time makes the mainland of New Guinea of vital importance to our security.14

There appears to have been two broad reasons why Spender took this forthright step. The first was domestically oriented. Sukarno’s public utterances could not have been ignored without provoking damaging claims that the Government was ‘appeasing’ the Indonesians.15 As a consequence of Indonesian claims and ongoing Dutch-Indonesian negotiations, the WNG issue had attracted increasing attention in the House during the first half of 1950, and the sentiments expressed by both Liberal-Country and Labor members had been almost unanimously in favour of a vigorous defence of Australia’s ‘vital’ interests in NG.16

The second reason was based on international considerations. It is likely that Spender’s speech to Cabinet coincided with private discussion between himself and Menzies, and that it was decided some provision – short of a private demarche broaching exclusive Dutch-Australian talks and the possibility of Australian control – should be made for Australian intervention in the dispute if necessary. Indeed, there seems to have been a fear that Indonesia’s militant attitude might cause the Dutch to

15 The UK High Commissioner to Australia, E. J. Williams, wrote that “Mr. Spender’s statement was delivered in response to urgent demands made yesterday by members from both sides of the House that Australia’s position in regard to the Indonesian claims to Dutch New Guinea should be made absolutely clear”. See telegram 419 from Williams to CRO, 8 June 1950, in FO 371/83704, PRO.
16 A second reason that warns against interpreting Spender’s speech too simplistically is the domestic considerations that partially motivated it. They are also revealing of the antecedents (as discussed in chapter 1) of popular Australian beliefs about NG. In February, the deputy leader of the Opposition, Arthur Calwell, had said: “Any Government that did not immediately indicate to the Javanese that if they intend to walk into Dutch New Guinea we shall walk in there before them, does not deserve to last five minutes….We can no more let the Indonesians into Dutch New Guinea than we can let them into Darwin….If we allow the Indonesians into Dutch New Guinea there will be no hope of our holding the northern portion of Australia and the fate of this country would then be sealed and certain.” (Parliamentary Debates, 23 February 1950, Vol. 206, p. 75) Similarly, Liberal backbencher Bruce Graham had, a day before, asserted that if Dutch New Guinea was not controlled by the Dutch or the Australians, “the thin end of the wedge will be inserted into Australian security”, and he added that for “strategic and political reasons it is impossible for us to permit New Guinea to fall under the domination of any country.” (Parliamentary Debates, 22 February 1950, Vol. 206, p. 1094)
weaken. This move, though it prevented firm support for any particular administrative model in WNG, did not contradict the hopes for a continued Dutch involvement as had been expressed in Spender’s earlier minute to Burton; rather, it provided, as envisaged, for sufficient flexibility to take emergency action in defence of Australian interests.

Reassuring voices were soon heard regarding the Dutch. A number of telegrams from The Hague and memoranda from the Pacific Division (DEA) stressed that the Dutch could not easily change the status of WNG. For example, Counsellor Patrick Shaw of the Pacific Division had stressed on 3 June that “should the Netherlands agree to a change of status it would be many months and probably over a year before the constitutional processes could be completed to give effect to the change”, whilst it was added that A. H. Hasselman, the First Secretary of the Netherlands Embassy, had “emphasised...that of course it has no intention of agreeing to a change.”17 Even more comforting were concrete steps by the Dutch to gain Australian diplomatic and military support in their apparent attempts to resist Indonesian claims. On 21 July, Hasselman wrote to Spender explaining that the Chairman of the Netherlands joint staff mission in Washington had been instructed to present a memorandum to the Combined Chiefs of Staff “regarding the strategic position of Netherlands New Guinea and in that connection, to stress the importance, for allied defense purposes, of maintaining Netherlands sovereignty over that area.”18 One of the points of this memorandum was said to be “the readiness of the Netherlands to arrive at close military cooperation in this area with the U.S.A., Australia and New Zealand.” The Dutch requested that the Australian representative on the Combined Chiefs of Staff back this move.

This seems to have been part of an orchestrated campaign to both soothe Australia and seeks its support, for the letter came on top of a request by Dirk Stikker, the Netherlands Foreign Minister, to see Spender personally.19 A good rapport with Australia would itself be important to the success of an international drive to secure backing for their position – which was paralleled by a similar campaign by the Indonesians – in lieu of the deadlock that had occurred within the Netherlands-Indonesian Commission. Charged with the task of formulating a joint report on WNG, which would then be presented to the respective Governments, the Commission was not even able to achieve this, and separate reports were tabled weeks after the original

17 P. Shaw (Counsellor, SEA Section, DEA) to Watt, 3 June 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
18 Note from A. H. Hasselman (First Secretary, Netherlands Embassy, Canberra) to Spender, 21 July 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
19 See Cablegram 96 from Sir Keith Officer (Australian Ambassador to France) to Spender, 8 May 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
deadline. The period between this breakdown (which, in reality, occurred soon after the 
Commission was formed) and a second ministerial conference on WNG scheduled for 
the end of the year, was one in which the protagonists were keen to gain a position of 
strength to take into negotiations.

Encouraged by the Dutch outlook, and yet wary of the possibilities that appeared 
inherent in the negotiating process, Spender travelled to the Netherlands in August. On 
1 September he cabled Menzies, giving him a full report of the outcome of the talks. He 
was evidently impressed with the fortitude of the Dutch attitude – indeed, Stikker 
gave him assurances that the Netherlands Government would not give in to the 
Indonesians – and he was consequently more confident than before that the forthcoming 
Dutch-Indonesian Ministerial Conference would result in a stalemate. Notably, his 
conviction over the immediate issue was not yet matched by identical sentiments 
regarding the exact long-term status of WNG, but even here his statements were 
becoming more certain than they had been:

So much for the immediate future. I am satisfied that we have succeeded in maintaining the 
status quo but next steps will present real difficulty...I found sympathetic support for our view 
from United States Ambassador but some disposition to seek to find some solution which of 
course means some compromise...It is this tendency to seek a so called solution that presents 
great danger. The course which I have advanced is that of no compromise. I think this is the 
safest one to pursue at the moment. If we show any disposition to compromise we only worsen 
our position later on and it may be that Dutch trusteeship will be accepted in which Australian 
vital interests will still be protected.  

Spender was, in fact, to have tremendous difficulty in his attempts to prevent a 
“solution” during the Dutch-Indonesian conference, but the enduring significance of the 
visit is that it seems to have provided final confirmation for the Australian Government 
that some kind of continuing Dutch involvement would be best.  

II 

If February to April 1950 (when ‘active security’ against Indonesia was defined and 
implemented) revealed that Australia believed itself to be neither seriously threatened 

20 Cablegram S58 from Spender to R. G. Menzies (Prime Minister of Australia), 1 September 1950, in 
A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 2, NAA. In late July, Menzies has also used a visit to Europe to defend 
Australian WNG policy; in London he had reiterated to the British that Australia would not tolerate an 
Indonesian presence in WNG. See Phelps, op.cit., p. 46.
21 Spender’s conversation with Ambassador Chapin may be found in telegram 334 from Chapin to 
Acheson, 30 August 1950, in Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter FRUS), Vol. VI, 1950, 
22 The visit did not, as Viviani (op.cit., p. 168) has claimed, roughly coincide with a “crystallisation” of 
Dutch policy.
23 Phelps, op.cit., p. 46, gives scant attention to important Australian considerations of an independent 
claim to WNG during 1950.
by Indonesia nor wholly dependent on the US and UK, but rather dominant in the Indonesia-SW Pacific area, then the period from May to August (in which some from of ongoing Dutch presence was chosen as best) provided confirmation.

Less direct attention was paid to the Indonesian position in these later months – just as there was less interaction with the British and Americans – but Australian activities, by inference, again betrayed presumptions of superiority regarding Indonesia, and comparative autonomy from Britain and the USA. Certainly, in hoping for, and encouraging, Dutch resistance in negotiations, Spender was supporting an attitude bitterly resented by the Indonesians as unjust, and opposed by the US and UK as contrary to a prudent spirit of compromise. In deciding to institutionalize this inflexibility by chasing a continued Dutch administrative engagement, the Minister was exhibiting a willingness to bear the ire of Indonesia, the USA, and Britain for some time. A cost of this kind would not have been borne by an insecure and dependent Government.

The main lesson of the emerging Australian attitude to the Dutch was, however, not so much the fact of Menzies Government confidence and independence, but verification from a different source of the positive conception that these characteristics represented. Put otherwise, in gravitating towards The Hague as a partial solution to the security question posed by the dispute, Spender and his colleagues behaved in a manner that again revealed Australians thought of themselves as representing a middle power. The principal point in this instance is that the Government ruthlessly and expediently looked to use the Dutch as a political and military proxy. Earlier works on WNG have failed to discern this coercive approach. 24 When faced with the awkward obstacles presented, on one hand, by Netherlands refusal to transfer any control in the negotiating process to Australia, and, on the other, by uncertainty over the eventual outcome of that process, Spender combined a willingness to admit to Dutch control with an unwillingness to allow them to decide alone what form this should take. His manipulative letter of 10 May, and retention of the option of Australian intervention, reveal this determination to have the Dutch, if they had to remain, remain on Australia’s terms. Pemberton has argued that Menzies foreign policy was driven by an “imperial imagination” 25 and, arguably, this was a guiding force for his Government here; nation states, if faced with practical and, or, political problems in maintaining an ‘outer’ sphere of influence (or buffer zone) should look to create a pliable or cooperative substitute.

25 Pemberton in Cain, op. cit., p. 156.
Later support for complete Dutch authority, and the more harmonious and sentimental atmosphere that accompanied it, should not be allowed to obscure its machiavellian basis.
By late 1952, the basic dynamics of the dispute – as they were to remain for most of the 1950s – had been set. The Dutch, though they had wavered in December 1950 by offering to pass sovereignty over WNG to the Union, had hardened against giving any real concessions to the Indonesians. In October 1952, the new W. Drees Government, which included the tough-minded Foreign Minister, Joseph Luns, publicly announced that it would not relinquish WNG, or accept restriction of its full sovereignty in any way. Rather, it would develop the territory to the point of self-determination. Further negotiations on issues of substance, which had failed again in February, were also rejected. The Indonesians, meanwhile, remained determined to achieve complete transfer, and had become increasingly frustrated and angry with the Dutch. Still, owing to military weakness, their successive governments had settled into a pattern of prosecuting the Irian campaign through standard political and legal channels.

The American position had changed a little since 1950, but not in an unpredictable manner. The administration of Democrat Harry S. Truman had adopted a more strict policy of neutrality – by trying to dampen tempers over WNG, whilst refusing to encourage or discourage negotiations – as the problem had become more intractable. This was conceived as a temporary measure, until the climate of Dutch-Indonesian relations became more favourable to compromise, but it was actually to endure as the US modus operandi until 1961.

The British stand had altered considerably after the re-election of a Tory Government in October 1951. Though new Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden continued to support Bevin’s policy of ‘cold storage’ – the strategy, which had emerged early in

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1 Cablegram 565 from The Hague, 27 December 1950, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 2, NAA.
2 Cablegram 589 from The Hague, 30 October 1952, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 5, NAA.
3 See Acheson to Richard Casey (Australian Minister for External Affairs as of April 1951) in cablegram 163 from Spender to Casey, 4 February 1952, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 3, NAA; Acheson to Cochran, 25 January 1952, in FRUS, Vol. XII, Pt 5, 1952-54, ‘East Asia and the Pacific’, pp. 249-51; and A. F. Peterson (position unidentified) to A. B. Foster (Deputy Director, Office of British Commonwealth and Northern European Affairs, State Department), 17 October 1952, 756C.00/10-1752, Box 3748, RG 59, DF 1950-54, A2.
4 For an example of American policy after the election in November 1952 of Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower, see telegram 1306 from John Foster Dulles (US Secretary of State) to The Hague, 30 March 1953, 756C.00/3/1953, Box 3748, RG 59, DF 1950-54, A2.
5 ‘Cold storage’ was not, as has been claimed (see Haupt, op.cit., p. 117, and Viviani, op.cit., pp. 174-75), first adopted by the Dutch, and later borrowed by Casey. Rather, it was a British idea developed in 1950, and proposed to Menzies as a policy in January 1951. The Prime Minister adopted this concept for different reasons to the British – a decision later aided by an Indonesian feeling that negotiations should be postponed for a time, and by a Dutch Cabinet crisis. For this sequence of events surrounding the
the year, of encouraging the Dutch and Indonesians to shelve the WNG problem for a period – this disguised significant fundamental modification. Under Bevin, the ‘icebox’ policy, as it was otherwise known, was a stop-gap measure in the absence of the preferred method of encouraging negotiations. For Eden, ‘cold storage’ became the ideal, whilst talks were viewed as an option to be used should this become impossible. In effect, Eden was seeking perpetuation of the status quo – and not only because of a desire to strengthen links with the Dutch in Europe, but also because of an eagerness to engender greater traditional ‘family’ intimacy with the Australian Government. In spite of the fact that ‘cold storage’ was soon to disappear, these motives stayed at the heart of a British policy of ‘no change’.

In Australia, Spender, as a result of ill-health, had tendered his resignation in April 1951. But he did not disappear. On Menzies’ advice, he accepted the position of Australian Ambassador to the United States – a vantage point from which he exerted influence on Australian WNG policy until the end of his tenure in 1958. His replacement as Minister for External Affairs was Richard Casey. Casey was a very different man, both in background and temperament, to his predecessor. From a wealthy and well-connected family, Casey was educated at Melbourne Grammar School, the University of Melbourne, and Cambridge University. His career prior to 1951, aided immeasurably by connections in Australian and British high society, was remarkable in its scope. In the First World War, he was a junior Staff Officer in the Australian Army, and afterward, in 1924, he was appointed as a representative of the Australian Government in London by Prime Minister Stanley Bruce. In 1931, he returned to Australia, joined the UAP, and became Federal Member for Corio. Two years later he was admitted to Cabinet as an Assistant Minister (Treasury), and he became Treasurer in his own right in 1935. Casey had ambitions of becoming Prime Minister, but they received a blow in 1934 with Menzies’ arrival in Canberra. Though Menzies was looked upon by some as arrogant, he had a sharper mind than Casey, and was certainly a better politician. The two men had a strained relationship from this time on – a fact not without importance in the 1950s – and when Menzies became Prime Minister in 1939,
he exiled Casey from Canberra, sending him to Washington as head of the Australian Legation.

Casey had tremendous success in the US in raising Australia’s profile, and establishing a rapport with numerous highly-ranked and influential figures. However, he grew increasingly unhappy after the Labor Government defeated the UAP on the floor of the House in 1941, and in 1942 accepted an extraordinary offer from Churchill to become British Minister resident in the Middle East. Here he became acquainted with many of the important Allied military leaders of the War. In 1943, Casey had wanted to return to Australian politics, but Labor was re-elected, and he chose instead the post of Governor of Bengal. This proved a difficult job, but, significantly, it brought him into contact with Asian anti-colonial feeling. Casey left Bengal hoping to take over leadership of the newly-formed Liberal Party from Menzies, but he missed the 1946 elections, and instead had to take a fund-raising role as party President. In 1949 he won the seat of La Trobe, and entered Cabinet as Minister of Works and Housing, and Minister of Supply and Development (later National Development). He was unhappy under Menzies, who was now firmly ensconced as party leader, but Menzies seems to have acknowledged his unparalleled array of contacts in Washington and London, along with his Asian experience, and therefore appointed him to External Affairs upon Spender’s departure. It was a position he was to occupy for almost a decade.

As a person, Casey was perhaps the quintessential British gentleman – he was emotionally limited, especially with regard to the expression of intimacy, though inculcated with the notions of decency, manliness, and duty. He was also shy, and yet highly sociable – and had developed a tendency to consult constantly with ‘experts’, rather than read about a subject. The latter was a habit that was to mark his tenure as Minister for External Affairs through his emphasis on the value of personal diplomacy – and it perhaps flowed from the high value he placed upon being ‘practical’. Certainly, Casey was no intellectual (some Cabinet colleagues, perhaps harshly, characterized him as a lightweight), nor was he creative by nature; he was more in the mould of a hard-working servant.

Unsurprisingly, the changeover from Spender to Casey had been relatively seamless in terms of WNG policy. Vigorous support for the ‘cold storage’ expedient in 1951-52 had not been indicative of a fundamental deviation in policy. Nor was the new

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10 Hudson, Casey, pp. 25, 27.
12 Hudson, Casey, pp. 25, 241.
tactic of "curing the boil" adopted in 1953. The Australians – realizing that Indonesia did not intend to give up its Irian campaign, but was rather seeking to 'internationalize' the dispute – tried to persuade the US and UK to declare to the Indonesians their opposition to Jakarta's claim. The Australians still thought their security was best protected by barring the Indonesians from NG, and by encouraging a Dutch presence of some kind. The only adjustment of enduring significance between 1951 and 1953 was the decision to back complete Dutch sovereignty, without any thought of partial Australian government. It is impossible to determine exactly when this choice was made – and, in reality, it is likely that it 'emerged' gradually in 1951 – but the point is that, with this development, the attitudes that were to be remembered as the cornerstones of archetypal 1950s Australian policy were given final definition.

II

In 1954, the now established positions of Britain, America, Indonesia, and Australia were shown clearly in action. As such, it was year which epitomized the nature of the dispute as a whole before the critical events of 1958. The occurrence that animated the year's proceedings was a decision by the Indonesian Government to 'internationalize' the campaign to gain 'freedom' for Irian. Though 1953 had been a relatively quiet year in the absence of Dutch-Indonesian negotiations, the Indonesians had begun to move towards using the United Nations as a means of forcing the Netherlands to back down. (Almost concurrently, the Australians had consolidated their supportive relationship with the Dutch by making an agreement for administrative cooperation between East and West New Guinea). Officials in Jakarta appear to have believed that if a pro-Indonesian resolution could be passed by the General Assembly, the Dutch, although not legally bound by such an act, could be coerced because of resultant political isolation.

The Australians, of course, were not given early official notice of Indonesian plans, though it was not difficult for them to see that policy was heading in an 'internationalist' direction. In February they heard of indications that the Indonesians

14 An outcome of this decision, and the tough policy of the new Drees Government of 1952, was the Netherlands-Australian cooperative agreement of July 1953. This involved mutual aid between the NG administrations in areas such as communications, health, and education. Politically speaking, it was geared to holding the Dutch to WNG for an indefinite (and preferably long) period.
15 See savingram 5 from Jakarta, 9 April 1953, and memorandum by Gilchrist for T. W. Eckersley (Counsellor, Pacific Branch, DEA), 13 April 1953, in A1838/278. 3036/6/1, Pt 6A, NAA.
16 See summary of Dutch-Australian meeting, Canberra, 7 July 1953, in A1838/278, 309/1/1, Pt 3, NAA.
had been approaching other countries in Southeast Asia vis-à-vis WNG,¹⁷ and a month later J. C. G. Kevin, the Australian Minister and Charge d'affaires in Jakarta, reported a decision at a conference of Indonesian diplomats to pursue a “more active” policy on WNG – something that would express itself in approaches to other governments of “like thinking”.¹⁸ Kevin also remarked that he had spoken to Hugh Cumming, the US Ambassador to Indonesia, who said he believed “things were steaming up over Dutch New Guinea”, and related confidentially that the Indonesians had asked for American support, “or at least that the United States attitude of neutrality be maintained.”

It was not long before the Australians clashed with the Indonesians in the diplomatic sphere – albeit indirectly. Given that the Colombo Conference of Asian Prime Ministers was approaching, there were fears in Canberra that the Indonesians might use the opportunity to seek support for their claim.¹⁹ In a forthright move, the Australian High Commissioner in Ceylon was asked by Canberra to seek an opportunity to explain the Australian position to the Prime Minister of that country, and perhaps suggest to him that he should not approve of the Indonesian claim. Fortunately for the Australians, the Ceylonese Prime Minister said he believed the Indonesian claim to be a colonial one, and that he not only disagreed with it, but would actively discourage Indonesia from raising the question at the conference.²⁰ In the event, the Indonesians did not mention the issue in any formal session, having apparently been told “no dice” by the Ceylonese in a closed informal meeting.²¹

This was a pleasing result for the Australians, especially considering Ceylon’s position as a newly-independent Asian state. On the other hand, officials at the DEA knew that this was for them merely the opening sortie in what promised to be a long campaign. Certainly, there were constant signals that Indonesia’s actions were preparatory to a concerted assault in the UN General Assembly. In early May, for example, the Burmese Charge d’affaires in Jakarta told the Australian Embassy that he thought the Indonesians might raise the Irian problem in the UN,²² while Indonesia’s

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¹⁷ C. T. Moodie (DEA Officer, London) to Tange, 16 February 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.
¹⁸ Savingram 13 from J. C. G. Kevin (Australian Minister and Charge d’affaires, Jakarta), 23 March 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.
¹⁹ Memorandum 202 from J. Plimsoll (Assistant Secretary, Geographical Regions Division, DEA) to A. R. Cutler (Australian High Commissioner, Colombo), 25 March 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.
²⁰ Letter from Cutler to Watt, 15 April 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.
²¹ See Cablegram 83 from Jakarta, 10 May 1954, and savingram 73 from Washington, 25 May 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 11, NAA.
²² Conversation between C. Lee (Counsellor, Australian Embassy, Jakarta) and Mya Sein (Burmese Charge d’affaires, Jakarta), 4 May 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 11, NAA.
nationalist *Merdeka* newspaper stated the country's "new tactics in regard to West Irian is [sic] still secret but will be executed when the right time comes." Three weeks later, Abu Hanifah (head of the UN and American Division, Indonesian Foreign Ministry) asked Kevin "whether Australia could not adopt an attitude of neturality", and claimed "that if Australia sided with the Dutch in any international forum, "Indonesia's enemies"...would make much of this fact". Hanifah need hardly have added that reference of the problem to the UN was "possible".

As the Indonesians looked to a multilateral solution, their historical relationship with the Dutch ground towards its death. Between June and August discussions were held at The Hague to determine the future of the Union, and it was decided that the institution should be abolished – although various separate agreements were to be signed. From a Dutch point of view the retention of some formal links was desirable in order to protect the expatriate community in the Republic, and to maintain the substantial economic interests they still had there. In the long-run, this was a vain wish. The residual anti-Dutch feeling – greatly exacerbated over the WNG issue – that drove the Indonesians to reject the symbol of continued Netherlands influence, would also provoke them to destroy the reality of that influence.

The most important immediate effect of the conclusion of Union discussions was that the Indonesians were now able to devote themselves fully to the planned international thrust for West Irian. At the close of the conference, Sunarjo, the Indonesian Minister for Foreign Affairs, made a formal public protest against the unilateral Dutch decision to rule over Irian and to refuse to discuss the problem further. On the same day, Ruslan Abdulgani, Secretary General of the Indonesian Foreign Ministry, confirmed that the Republic would bring the question before the General Assembly in the form of a request for the Dutch to resume negotiations over the territory.

The Australian response to this move was suggested a week later by Casey in parliament:

> I think I can forecast the attitude of the Australian Government that we will resist the matter being included in the agenda in the forthcoming U. N. Assembly. However, it may be beyond our power to stop the matter being discussed at the U. N. When it is discussed we will again with
Thus, the Australian line of defence was twofold. The first action would be an attempt to shipwreck the Indonesian scheme before it got out to sea. Under the procedural rules set down in the UN Charter, any item on the provisional agenda was first set before the General Committee, which then made recommendations to the General Assembly regarding the item’s inclusion or rejection concerning the agenda proper.28 The Australians had the right to argue against any pro-Indonesian item in the General Committee, in the hope of attaining a negative recommendation, which might then prejudice voting in the next phase. Before a vote in the General Assembly, a simple majority of which was necessary for the transfer of an item from the provisional to the effective agenda, the Australians again had a chance to argue their case, and lobby for exclusion. Success for Australia in either the General Committee and, more importantly, in the Assembly, would be ideal, but its probability was low; most members of the UN voted for the inclusion of any item not deemed to be aimed at grossly misusing the organization’s function.

Australia’s second plan, as Casey mentioned, would involve a clear statement of Government policy on WNG, but this, in turn, would be part of an overall attempt to ensure the Australians did not gain the requisite two-thirds majority for the passing of a General Assembly resolution favourable to their claim.29 In this context, the Australians were also aware it would be important in 1954 to create precedents inimical to the realization of Indonesian ambitions. Because the General Assembly met annually, it was likely Indonesia might, if it failed at first, raise WNG repeatedly in the hope of securing a change in the previous year’s voting configuration. This, however, would be difficult if a large blocking group was established, for it was not typical for the bulk of member nations to alter their initial stance on issues regularly before the Assembly. A small oppositional minority, on the other hand, would give the Indonesians much greater hope of altering the situation to their advantage – particularly as the proportion of Third World members increased. Therefore, though the Australians were focussed first on fighting WNG’s inclusion on the agenda, and then on defeating the threat of a

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27 Copy of answer to question without notice in the House, 18 August 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 11, NAA.
29 A two-thirds majority (as opposed to a simple one) was necessary for decisions on questions seen to be “important”, including “recommendations with respect to the maintenance of international peace and security”. See ibid., p. 19.
successful Indonesian resolution, they were aware that events following the dispute’s introduction to the UN contained critical possibilities in the long-term.

For the Australians, the battle over inscription was predictably not very encouraging. In the lead up to General Committee debate, a member of the Australian Embassy in Washington inferred to Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell-Smith that the US should oppose inscription, but a week later Arthur Tange, Watt’s replacement as Secretary of the DEA, told Casey that the American attitude would apparently involve abstention on inscription and anything following. Even the British were not particularly enthusiastic about the Australian approach. On 15 September, they passed an aide memoire to the DEA, which said that the UK Embassy in The Hague had been “instructed to inform the Netherlands Government that...they would be wiser to...accept the inscription of the item", although it was also noted the British Government would not oppose Netherlands policy if the Dutch were determined to resist. The Australians had already told the British they would not be moved, pending Dutch views, and the Netherlands decided to ignore UK advice, so London reluctantly went along with Dutch-Australian tactics, yet this minor divergence was a harbinger of worse to come.

General Committee debate began on 22 September. Indonesia’s representative, Dr Sudjarwo Tjondronegoro, adopted tactics – involving both claims of Indonesian good faith and implicit threats – that were to become familiar to members of the UN over the following years. He argued that his country had consistently attempted to solve the dispute by peaceful means, and that Dutch refusal to discuss the question contradicted the provisions of the Round Table agreements and the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. In contrast, he also spoke of those “who would prefer to meet the problem with drastic and extreme measures”, and claimed that “continued abeyance of this dispute will certainly increase tensions to a degree endangering not only relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands, but the peace and security of that important area of Southeast Asia itself.” Taking account of these statements, and the claim in Indonesia’s explanatory memorandum that the Dutch were suppressing a

30 Cablegram 864 from Washington, 2 September 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
31 Cablegram 99 from Tange to Casey, 11 September 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
32 Memorandum by Office of UK High Commissioner, Canberra, 15 September 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA. The Australians also had problems with NZ and Canada; see cablegram 455 from Casey to P. R. Heydon (Australian High Commissioner, Wellington), 23 September 1954, and Casey to Lester Pearson (Secretary of State, Canadian DEA), 24 September 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
movement for freedom in Irian, the Australian representative, Sir Douglas Copland, said that Australia approached the question "with the friendliest attitude towards Indonesia", but added "We cannot feel that this is a matter of acute dispute, of injustice, of discontent on the part of the people concerned, or in any way causing a disturbance to peace that would require invocation of the United Nations Charter". Airing the issue, he went on, would not be in the interests of the West Papuans and would create tensions that did not currently exist. Finally, Copland attacked Indonesia’s claim that WNG rightfully belonged to the Republic:

Nor do we think that the legal grounds have any real substance. We do not feel that there is a case. Nor can we feel from our knowledge of the Territory that ethnically, culturally or linguistically, the people of New Guinea have a close affinity with the peoples of Indonesia.

Like Tjondronegoro’s address, Copland’s defence, in its challenge to the idea that the dispute was dangerous, and particularly with its emphasis on WNG’s separateness from Indonesia, foreshadowed what was to become a common argument on the part of his country. A notably absent facet of the Australian thesis was any reference to the basis of the Menzies Government’s interest in the dispute: that of the perceived strategic importance of WNG. In fact, this element was to play an increasingly smaller role in public justifications of Australian policy, and it was a development that sprang from the internationalization of the struggle over WNG, combined with the growing influence of the anti-colonial bloc in the UN. The Australians realised that if they were to have any hope of fending off the Indonesian campaign in the UN over successive years, they would have to avoid basing their case primarily on something that could be pilloried as exemplifying imperialist realpolitik.

Despite Copland’s efforts, and a strong statement from the Netherlands representative, D. J. Von Balluseck, the General Committee chose, by seven votes to three, with five abstentions, to recommend the inclusion of the WNG question on the Assembly’s agenda. During the Assembly’s consideration of this recommendation, Casey concentrated on Copland’s earlier contention that UN discussion would increase tensions. He said that the UN would, by inscribing the item, “saddle itself with a problem that is not going to be solved in the only way that Indonesia...wants it to be solved”, because “the Dutch do not intend to abandon their responsibilities or their

34 Quotations from extracts of The Canberra Times and the Sydney Morning Herald respectively, 23 September 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
35 ‘General Assembly, General Committee, Summary Records’ (hereafter GC), 92nd Meeting, 22 September 1954, in the UN’s Official Records (hereafter UNOR).
36 The Canberra Times, 23 September 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
37 See GC, 92nd Meeting, 22 September 1954, UNOR.
sovereignty.” The only result would be to inflame relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands and Australia, whilst destabilizing a fragile SEA. This proved true enough, but it appears that many in the Assembly who were not obliged to support the Indonesian claim believed that a disturbance of the peace was already evident, and that the Republic therefore had a right to request discussion of the issue regardless of alleged consequences. This group, combined with the growing number who were motivated more by anti-Western sentiment and the politics of the anti-colonial bloc than views on the substance of the problem, enabled the Indonesians to easily attain the inscription of WNG on to the agenda with a vote of 39 to 11, with 10 abstentions.

Following the failure of the initial Dutch-Australian attempt to block Indonesian plans, focus again shifted away from plenary meetings of the General Assembly. In accordance with usual practice, the Assembly would not vote on an issue until it had received a report, which could contain recommendations, from one of its Main Committees – the relevant one in connection with WNG being the First (Political) Committee. Given that any member of the Assembly could be represented on this committee, the results of its deliberations were often reflected in the final plenary vote. Thus, although its decisions did not have the same authority as those of the General Assembly, they were of considerable importance.

In the interim between WNG’s inscription and the First Committee’s consideration of the question, the Netherlands and Australian delegations painstakingly constructed a resolution designed to counter the expected Indonesian one. The idea behind this was not to try and prevent the referral of the Indonesian resolution to the plenary session, which needed only a simple majority, but to establish another resolution that would add to the effect of many likely abstentions in a Committee vote, and consequently prevent the development of a large majority on which Indonesia’s resolution – and any future “fiercer” resolution – depended for success in the General Assembly. Here opposition came from an unexpected quarter. The British decided they would not back the move. The Dutch-Australian resolution stressed that the people of WNG should eventually be given the opportunity to determine their own future, and the UK felt this would create a precedent for UN interference in the administration of

39 See conversation between Casey and Sir Stephen Holmes (British High Commissioner, Canberra), 5 November 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
40 Conversation between Casey and A. M. L. Winkelman (Dutch Ambassador, Canberra), 29 October 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
non-self-governing territories. They were particularly fearful of the way such a resolution would affect the handling of the Cyprus problem and other British colonial questions to come before the UN. In a telegram from New York, the British Ambassador to the UN, Pearson Dixon, wrote:

From the United Kingdom point of view it is difficult to imagine a more damaging resolution. It would embarrass us in our colonial policy generally at the United Nations since it contravenes the basic principle that the United Nations has no right to pronounce upon the political affairs of non-self-governing territories. It would complicate our task in obtaining rejection of a draft resolution recommending self-determination for Cyprus...It would be in future virtually impossible for any colonial Power successfully to oppose the passage of similar resolutions about any and every non-self-governing territory.

Hence the harmonious spirit between the UK and Australia that had been in place since Churchill’s assumption of office quickly melted as the issue impinged upon real British interests.

Some critics of Australian foreign policy might have expected Menzies and his colleagues to have repented rapidly, and gone along with the British suggestion that they simply vote against the Indonesian resolution. This was hardly the case. When the British High Commissioner to Australia, Sir Stephen Holmes, came to plead with Casey on behalf of his Government, the Minister reiterated Australian motives behind the resolution and curtly told him that it was primarily a Dutch exercise and that the UK should concentrate on them. Moreover, as recorded in his diary, Casey reminded him that we hadn’t had much co-operation from them on Dutch New Guinea. I’d asked Eden at least twice to let the Indonesians know that they (the U. K.) were not in favour of the Indonesian case on Dutch New Guinea, but so far as I knew they’d never in fact done anything about it.

Later, a New Zealand representative described Australian-British differences in New York as having reached the stage of “acrimony”. Eventually a compromise was

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41 Cablegram 2795 from London, 3 November 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
42 Telegram 1110 from Pierson Dixon (UK Ambassador to the UN) to FO, 2 November 1954, in FO 371/112146, PRO.
43 The Anglo-Australian split over WNG in 1954 has been adequately covered by Phelps, op.cit., pp. 197-201, but, in an example of the limitations of histories based on the public record, was unknown to Haupt, op.cit., pp. 136-40, and Viviani, op.cit., p. 182.
44 For UK advice, see Telegram 1110 from Pierson Dixon (UK Ambassador to the UN) to FO, 2 November 1954, in FO 371/112146, PRO.
45 Conversation between Casey and Holmes, 5 November 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
46 Casey, Diaries, 5 November 1954, MS 6150, Series 4, Box 27, Vol. 17, p. 206, NLA.
47 Tanekaha (New Zealand representative to the UN, initials unidentified) to Clifton Webb (New Zealand Minister for External Affairs), 11 November 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA. In an example of this antipathy, the British referred to how Spender “bitterly attacked us behind our backs”, while among themselves they complained of the “Australian failure to keep us informed of their intentions.” Minute by unidentified FO officer, 17 November 1954, in FO 371/112148, PRO.
worked out in terms of the wording of the draft, but the episode left a bad taste in the mouths of those involved, and demonstrated that the cultural and ideological similarities of the Liberal and Conservative Governments did not preclude the possibility of clashes similar to those between Spender and the Labour Government in 1950.

The US position was more consistent relative to Australian policy, as demonstrated by American activities from late September on. Though the Australians and the Dutch recognised US determination to abstain not only on the agenda issue, but also on any subsequent resolutions, both persisted in their attempts to sway the Americans. The Australians had again, prior to the vote on inscription, encouraged Americans who were sympathetic to their cause – such as Under Secretary of State Bedell-Smith – to use their influence, and in the period leading up to the First Committee’s deliberations, Casey raised WNG with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles at an ANZUS Council meeting. A record of this event shows that Casey again harped on the tensions that would result from the discussion of WNG in the UN, though he was less circumspect than he had been in the Assembly about the main reason for Australia’s interest:

It would be a wise move to avoid what would inevitably be some bitter debate in the First Committee and in the Assembly. The Indonesians would not, as a matter of practical politics, be compensated by the Latin American vote for the loss of sound friends who were in a position to assist Indonesia. Mr. Casey reminded Mr. Dulles that he had on several occasions taken pains to impress on him the possibility of a Communist coup in Indonesia and the threat it would pose to our security. He suggested that this point of view of Mr. Dulles had relevance to the United States attitude on the Dutch New Guinea issue.  

Percy Spender, who had been called upon to work with the Australian delegation during the 9th Assembly, augmented Casey’s emphasis on the strategic argument with an emotive appeal to traditional American sympathy for the principle of self-determination. Significantly, he tied this to a specific request:

It was difficult to see in these enlightened days how a million people could be handed over from one Government to another without thought as to their ultimate right of self-determination. Surely the United States could say that no action should be taken by the United Nations which affected in praesenti the right of self-determination of the peoples of Netherlands New Guinea...the Indonesian draft resolution should be resisted as being contrary to the Charter. He hoped that the United States could put forward certain propositions in Committee discussions which would make this apparent.

48 See B. B. Hickey (Third Secretary, UN Branch, DEA) to Tange, 17 November 1954, and cablegram 2900 from London, 16 November 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.  
49 Cablegram 280 from A. Stirling (Australian Ambassador to the Netherlands), 8 September 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.  
50 Casey, Diaries, 17 September 1954, MS 6150, Series 4, Box 28, Vol. 17, p. 88, NLA.  
51 ibid., p. 172.  
52 ibid., p. 173.
Dulles had remarked politely that he would “reflect” on what Casey had said,53 but the Americans stood firm. On 27 October Dulles cabled the US delegation in New York, stressing that the “reasons for taking [a] position of neutrality…continue [to be] valid and therefore our position will be maintained.” These reasons were succinctly re-stated by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Walter S. Robertson:

The U. S. has maintained a position of neutrality toward the dispute. This position has been adopted to avoid as much as possible offending the Australians, the Dutch or the Indonesians.54

On 10 November, J. H. van Roijen, the Dutch Ambassador in Washington, approached Dulles with the request that the US support the Dutch-Australian counter-resolution.55 In doing so, he drew attention to confirmation in the resolution of “the willingness of the Netherlands Government to give the inhabitants of West New Guinea the opportunity to determine their own future”, and expressed the hope that “the positive aspects” of the draft “would appeal to the U. S. Government”. Again the Americans were not to be moved, as Dulles’ rejoinder made clear:

After very careful soul-searching the U. S. Government had decided that it must continue to maintain its policy of strict neutrality in this New Guinea question although admittedly this was not a glorious posture. Certainly if only the welfare of the inhabitants of West New Guinea were concerned we would have to admit that development toward ultimate political self-determination would be better assured under the present rule. However…there were many other important factors involved.

In his explanation of these “factors”, Dulles revealed that the fears of a communist take-over in Indonesia evident in a National Security Council (NSC) Policy Paper of late 1953 were still foremost in the minds of American policy-makers.56 He remarked that “there were…areas which we…were most anxious should not fall to the Communist side…[which] was the basis for our policy that we do nothing to push the Government of Indonesia off its delicate balance on to the wrong side”. Concern at the thought of distancing the Indonesians was shared at lower levels within the State Department. In a

53 ibid., p. 179.
54 W. S. Robertson (Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Department) to R. Murphy (Deputy Under Secretary of State, State Department), 3 December 1954, 756C.00/12-354, box 3748, RG 59, DF 1950-54, A2.
56 NSC Policy Paper 171/1, “United States Objectives and Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Indonesia”, 20 November 1953, RG 273, A2. This was later approved by the President. (The function of the National Security Council, as established by the National Security Act of 1947 (Amended) was “to advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to national security so as to enable the military services and other departments and agencies of the Government to cooperate more effectively in matters of national security.” Cited in H. M. Jackson, (ed), The National Security Council: Jackson Subcommittee on Policy-Making at the Presidential Level, New York, 1965, p. 296.
letter to the Assistant Secretary of the European Bureau, Livingston T. Merchant, Robertson had written:

I have supported our policy of neutrality...because I believe that that policy is politically sound. If this Government had supported the Dutch position in the General Assembly, we would...have weakened U.S. influence and prestige in Indonesia, and thereby helped to promote the very situation which we wish to prevent, namely, the growth of Communist influence in a critically important area of Southeast Asia.

In essence, US policy had become highly predictable by this time. The administration of Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower (elected in November 1952) had initially followed the path chosen by the previous Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, and by late 1954, this position was a firmly entrenched part of US Southeast Asian policy. Eisenhower’s long reign as President, paralleled by Dulles’ tenure at the State Department, meant that the conservatism of the US stand on WNG became protracted, despite the increasing pressure of a deteriorating situation in Indonesia. Still, at the time, and from the perspective of the dispute’s protagonists, US policy could change in spite of its apparently rigid status. It was this belief – rather than a misunderstanding of the basis of US policy – that drove the Dutch-Australian coalition, and the Indonesians, to work incessantly for an alteration in the US attitude. At the same time, both groups, though seeing the influence on American neutrality of objectives in Europe, on the one hand, and SEA on the other, failed to realize the sheer strength of these opposing influences.

Apart from consideration of the wording of a counter resolution, the Dutch and Australian delegations spent much time before the First Committee debate looking for a sponsor for their resolution – something they believed necessary if an alternative to a pro-transfer resolution was to have any credibility. By the time discussion began, they had still not found a suitable country. Meanwhile, the Indonesians had put forward a resolution calling for the Netherlands and Indonesia “to resume negotiations, without delay, as provided for by the Round Table Conference agreement, with a view to achieving an early agreement on the political status of West Irian”. It also invited the Secretary-General to aid the parties in the pursuit of this aim, specifically by appointing a mediator if the Dutch and Indonesians agreed. The Secretary-General would then submit a report on negotiations at the next General Assembly. Tjondronegoro supported the resolution in his opening speech by arguing that the dispute was dangerous, and that the Dutch had been intransigent, but that there was still hope for peace if negotiations

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57 Robertson to L. T. Merchant (Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of European Affairs, State Department), 2 November 1954, 756C.00/11-254, box 3748, RG 59, DF 1950-54, A2. Sukarno had personally been pressing the US to change its stance. See, for example, telegram by H. Cumming (US
could take place with UN help. He also argued that the Indonesian case was legally watertight, and that the question of WNG’s ethnic and cultural differences was irrelevant considering Indonesia’s heterogeneous make-up. The question was essentially one of freedom or the continuance of the “colonial-military” regime in Irian – a regime which had suppressed movements for liberation in the territory, and done little to promote development. In reply, Von Balluseck charged that there was no racial, cultural or historical link between the peoples of WNG, and that the matter was about “political ambition” for Indonesia, as opposed to Netherlands concern for Papuan interests.

Spender took the floor the next day. He predictably repeated many of the arguments used by his Dutch counterpart, though his speech was notable for two reasons. Firstly, it was particularly vociferous in its attack on the Indonesian position. He said that “Australia...did not accept that a threat to the peace existed in connexion with West New Guinea per se”, but claimed the Indonesians had aggravated the situation by their rhetoric – which “sounded very much like a threat” – and through infiltrations into WNG. Australia, he continued, had “friendly relations” with Indonesia, but the latter “should feel neither surprised nor resentful that all interests involved and all aspects would be exposed to the extent necessary”. Part of this hard-hitting expose was a provocative analysis of the relationship between the legal and political aspects of the Indonesian petition:

A...point in the Indonesian case was the claim that the problem was in substance of a political and not of a juridical nature. A reason for that might conceivably be that in spite of its recital of legal grounds, Indonesia felt that its case was too weak to rest on legal grounds alone. Or perhaps the Indonesians were being more candid than they realized, and it might be justifiably concluded that their legal arguments should not be regarded as containing merit in themselves, but had been brought forward merely to bolster a political claim. If that was the case, then one began to see why the Committee might expect to hear of threats to the peace. The question was, who was making the threats?

A second significant aspect of Spender’s discourse was his repeated reference, in contrast to earlier caution, to Australia’s strategic interest in WNG. He did not neglect commenting on the Papuan right to self-determination, but the importance of WNG to the security of Australia was prominent, occupying much of his attention at the outset, and being one of the notes upon which he concluded: “Australia”, he said, “felt its

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58 Tjondronegoro’s opening speech to the First Committee, 23 November 1954, can be found in The Question of West Irian in the United Nations, 1954-1957, pp. 35-72.

59 See a summary of the address by D. J. Von Balluseck (Netherlands representative, UN) in ibid., pp. 72-76.

60 Emphasis original. ‘General Assembly, First Committee, Summary Notes’ (hereafter FC), 727th Meeting, 24 November 1954, in UNOR.
destiny and defence closely bound up with West New Guinea, which stood so close to it”, and it was for this reason that his delegation “viewed with utmost gravity the plea which had been brought before the Committee that the United Nations should endorse the claim that...sovereignty...should be transferred.”

There was some feeling in the DEA that Spender had “gone over the top” – and under the influence of this sentiment Casey apparently instructed him by cable to “calm down”61 – but there is little doubt his general approach was approved by Cabinet. Speaking in 1956, by which time Spender had been away from Canberra for even longer, James Plimsoll (Assistant Secretary, Geographical Regions Division, DEA) was able to remark that the Ambassador “still has authority” in a Cabinet of which “the bulk...is pro-Dutch and/or anti-Indonesian.”62 Menzies, formally and socially the dominant force in Cabinet, perhaps best expressed the view he and his colleagues would have had of Spender’s efforts when he later confided to Eric Harrison (the Australian High Commissioner to the UK): “I am, as you know, not unduly oppressed by the alleged or real sensitivities of our Asian colleagues.”63

Toward the end of debate in the First Committee, a group of eight nations introduced an alternative draft resolution which expressed the hope that the Dutch and Indonesians would pursue a solution in accordance with the UN Charter, and requested that they report any progress at the 10th Assembly. Although it was something of a dilution of their proposal, the Indonesians accepted this draft, and withdrew their own. Nevertheless, the majority in favour of this plan was smaller than expected; it was passed by a vote 34 to 14, with 10 abstentions. The Australians had been pessimistic about the chances of preventing a two-thirds majority in the Assembly, but this result was heartening. Speaking in Canberra with a member of the Dutch Embassy, K. C. O. Shann, the Head of the DEA’s UN Branch, said he believed Indonesian attempts to win over enough members for success in the Assembly would be “beyond them”.64 This was an accurate judgement. None of the operative paragraphs of the eight-Power resolution achieved more than the 34 votes gained overall in the First Committee, and the motion was thereby rejected.

51 See K. C. O. Shann (Head, UN Branch, DEA) to Tange, 26 November 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.
63 Menzies to Eric Harrison (Australian High Commissioner, London), 4 February 1957, in M2576/1, 38, NAA.
64 Note by Shann on record of Conversation with H. C. Jorrison (Second Secretary, Netherlands Embassy, Canberra), 8 December 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.
The public Australian reaction to a successful end of an arduous UN campaign was muted. Excited by the failure of the Republic to move a step closer to acquiring WNG, Casey was at the same time anxious to minimize antagonism. A cable sent to New York after the Assembly vote, stated:

In any public comment [the] Minister will avoid any note of exaltation and [we] suggest you do likewise. The result will speak for itself.\(^65\)

Furthermore, in an end of year address Casey went out of his way to emphasize the importance his Government attached to friendship with Indonesia:

The main points of the foreign policy of the Australian Government were those of maintaining friendly relations with Indonesia our nearest neighbour. We differ with Indonesia over West New Guinea but we are determined not to allow that to obstruct our cooperation in other matters, indeed we have given every reason to want to live in harmony with our largest and closest neighbour. We have continued to give assistance under the Colombo Plan and have recently renewed a trade agreement.\(^66\)

In spite of these efforts, there can be no doubt that the 9\(^{th}\) General Assembly contributed to a marked degeneration in Australian-Indonesian relations. The impact of face-to-face disagreement, not quite vehement, but often close to the bone, and widely reported in both countries, was to increase privately expressed resentment – particularly on the Indonesian side. Hanifah, for instance, was later to describe Spender’s speeches as having been “so “crude” and so inelegant that they harmed Australia”.\(^67\) Likewise, Sunarjo said that “It was particularly wounding to see how Australia conducted its case in the U.N.”, and added that “Australia is in danger of missing the bus...because it is throwing away the friendship of her nearest neighbour”.\(^68\)

The continued growth of Dutch-Australian solidarity was a more positive product of the dispute for Canberra. The Australian and Netherlands delegations had worked closely in New York, and this added to the intimacy which had grown since the Dutch elections of 1952. Following the failure of the eight-nation resolution, Casey sent a message of congratulations to Luns, while Tange expressed the cordiality that had developed by thanking Dutch Ambassador A. W. Winkelman and his Embassy “very sincerely” for their “great assistance”, and by speaking of the “hard work...and day-to-day co-operation between our delegations”.\(^69\) At a time when relations with the US over

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\(^65\) Cablegram 409 to New York (also to Jakarta and The Hague), 11 December 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.

\(^66\) Extracts of speech by Casey in cablegram to Jakarta, 31 December 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.

\(^67\) Crocker, Diaries, 9 June 1955, mfm G20735, NLA.

\(^68\) ibid., 13 June 1955.

\(^69\) Letter from Tange to Winkelman, 14 December 1954, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.
WNG were uneasy, and were even a little tender with the British, friendship with the Dutch had reached a new high.

Taking a broad look at the events of 1954, it is possible to see that they set the tone for events until the end of 1957, when Indonesia brought WNG to the UN for the last time in the decade. The year had begun with rumours of an Indonesian offensive in the UN, followed by an intense campaign for support, and terse debate in the General Assembly – only to end in defeat for the Republic, and a consequent increase in bitterness, frustration, and tension in Indonesia over Irian. These results, and a changing domestic and international environment, were eventually to produce actions in Jakarta that were to change the course of the WNG dispute.

III

Indonesia’s 1954 campaign of ‘internationalization’ showed not only the fully established positions of the Netherlands, Indonesia, Australia, the US, and the UK ‘at work’, it also brought together what would in hindsight be viewed as the dispute’s typical 1950s features. Because of this, the year affords a representative overview of what Australian policy on WNG shows of Australian self-perception in the period prior to 1958. Here, close scrutiny of Australian actions shows not different convictions to those earlier exhibited, but, contrarily, that Australia still thought of itself as a middle power.

A fearless and largely careless attitude towards the Indonesian state was, of course, again displayed. Beginning with the attempt to destroy a possible Indonesian initiative among the Asian Prime Ministers at Colombo, the Australian Government reiterated that it was prepared to lock horns with the Indonesians – and this in spite of a growing awareness in Canberra that Irian was, in Jakarta, more a key issue than ephemeral.70 This combative approach, and an accompanying disregard for its consequences on the bilateral relationship, was most poignantly demonstrated in the UN forum. The Indonesians were well aware of the Australian Government’s position, but its attempts to demolish Indonesian arguments on a world stage were particularly irksome for its face-conscious Asian neighbours. Nevertheless, Spender – as a DEA eyewitness has described – “seemed to take a positive joy in hammering the

70 In an example of this increasing awareness, Eckersley noted in late 1953 that “we have recently come to regard as a danger” the idea that Sukarno “means what he says” about WNG. Minute by Eckersley for Plimsoll, 4 August 1953, on cablegram 309 from Jakarta, 3 August 1953, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 7A, NAA.
Indonesians.” His only fear (shared by Cabinet) – and as opposed to the repercussions of Indonesia’s humiliation – was that Sukarno and his colleagues might be able to circumvent Indonesia’s impotence and irrelevance by tapping the anti-colonial movement in the UN.

Australia’s dominant posture towards its immediate region also, as before, had an effect on the way in which British and American opinion was handled. It was no coincidence that the Menzies Government’s self-assured actions in connection with Indonesia were directly paralleled by activities aggressively independent – and commonly demanding – of the USA and Britain. Spender, in spite of the more sympathetic outlook of the Churchill Government, thought little of disregarding strongly-expressed British advice; he did not, as he told the Americans, “see why Australia…should…be saddled with the responsibility for pulling H.M.G.’s chestnuts out of the fire.” The anglophilic Menzies may not have stated the problem in quite this manner, but where WNG was concerned, he agreed with the necessity of occasionally flaunting (if uncomfortably) UK desires. Certainly, he made no effort to intervene in the protracted and acrimonious debate between the two delegations in New York.

Australian attempts to push the Americans from neutrality towards the Dutch position came on top of months of lobbying along similar lines – lobbying that had at times irritated officials in Washington. Thus in continuing their ‘dripping tap’ campaign during 1954, the Australians were evincing a readiness not only to cut across an oft-repeated official position, but to risk a degree of ingrained exasperation with Canberra’s stand on the issue – an outlook axiomatically at odds with the notion that Australia was a pliable dependent. This point is reinforced by the fact that the Australians were aware of feeling in the State Department that denial of WNG to the Indonesians was aiding the cause of communism in the archipelago.

From a wide-angle perspective, the period from 1954 to 1957, which included three further Indonesian failures at the UN, revealed Australia at the height of its belief

71 A. Parsons (at the time, a member of the Australian delegation), South East Asian Days, Brisbane, 1998, p. 25.
72 Minute by Paterson, 15 November 1954, in FO 371/112148, PRO.
73 See, for example, Casey’s request that the Americans make “a positive statement [to the Indonesians] that the Indonesian claim to Western New Guinea was not recognized by the U. S.” Minutes of ANZUS Council second session, 9 September 1953, box 3, Lot 55D388, RG 59, General Records of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs 1953, Miscellaneous Subject Files 1953, A2.
74 Agitation over Australian remonstrances was no doubt reflected in an empathetic cable from H. F. Matthews (US Ambassador to the Netherlands) to Dulles: “I can well understand [the] Department’s wish that [the] New Guinea problem would just go away”. Telegram 1061 from The Hague to Dulles, 13 April 1954, 756C.004-1354, Box 3748, RG 59, DF 1950-54, A2.
75 See cablegram 10 from Casey to Spender, 5 January 1952, in A1838/278, 3036/6/1, Pt 1B, NAA.
in itself as the main power south of Singapore. Continuing resistance to Indonesia, and a consistent preparedness to cut across and cajole the UK and (particularly) the US, was evidence of the fact that the Australian Government and its people had never been so confident that they could, by applying an old imperial model, deal with the post-War challenges thrown up by their immediate region. There were two basic reasons for this confidence. Firstly, nothing was seen to have happened in Indonesia that changed its status as a weak and unstable construction, incapable of contesting Australia's position in the foreseeable future. If anything, domestic turmoil in the country, which in late 1956 resulted in the effective demise of parliamentary democracy in the Republic, and the rise of division along geographical, ethnic, and religious lines, apparently made Indonesia less able than ever to pose an external threat. Secondly, the broad factors believed central to the maintenance of Australia's 'inner' and 'outer' spheres (that is, respectively, the area east of the PNG-WNG border, and WNG itself) – Anglo-American domination of mainland SEA, and the continued view of these two nations that they had interests in this area – were, in spite of various problems, apparently still in place.
Chapter 4: Turmoil in Indonesia, and Resultant Changes in the WNG Policies of Interested Powers, 1957-58

I

The established dynamics of the dispute were shattered between late 1957 and mid-1958. The root causes of this complex process revolved around changes in Indonesia’s internal situation, which subsequently impacted on the country’s external policies and foreign relations. Domestically, the country became increasingly enveloped in conflict during 1957. The tumult of late 1956 – conflict in the Army, attacks on the party system, and regional rebellions – had continued, and by the fall of the second Ali Sastroamidjojo Cabinet in March 1957, the political scene had taken on a thoroughly new complexion. The influence of the parties had been replaced by four nodal points of power: Sukarno, the Army under General Abdul Haris Nasution, regional leaders, and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).1 Between March and the time WNG came before the UN in September, there were a number of important developments. Amongst these was the appointment by Sukarno of an “emergency, extraparliamentary business cabinet”, which contained two PKI sympathizers.2 The Cabinet soon put in place a National Council, consisting of non-party (appointed) representatives of the people, which had its origins in a plan announced earlier by the President to bring about a new system of government by consensus. At its formal inception, the Council was officially subordinated to Cabinet, but it was widely viewed as weakening the status of the Cabinet and parliament. The relationship between Java and the outer regions, meanwhile, was convoluted, but generally worsened. Nasution and the Army, for their part, gained from the declaration of a State of War and Siege associated with the regional mutiny; they could now legitimately bring their weight to bear upon the political process. In terms of the PKI, the Party’s potential leverage rose considerably when it won 27.4% of the vote in the regional Javanese elections of June, July, and August.

It was this last happening, more than anything, that persuaded US officials that Indonesia was on the verge of falling to communism – convictions which, in turn, radicalized the relationship between Washington and the Jakarta Government.3 A National Security Council edict in early August brought into being a highly secret Ad

1 Feith, op.cit., p. 548.
2 The quotation is contained in ibid., p. 579, and the account of the situation in Indonesia in this paragraph is based on pp. 579-582.
Hoc Interdepartmental Committee (including Defense, the State Department, and the Central Intelligence Agency) charged with the task of assessing the implications of communist gains. It was also asked to formulate possible courses of action, including those that might be taken “in the event of imminent or actual Communist control of Java.” The Committee’s work was presented to the NSC at the beginning of September, and became the basis of a new dual orientation in American Indonesia policy. One focus was recommended as being the maintenance of “official diplomatic relations...as near as possible to what they have been in the recent past”, and the other was covert – to “contribute to the establishment of a government able and willing to pursue vigorous anti-Communist domestic policies and actions.” The latter aim was to be furthered by “exploiting the not inconsiderable potential political resources and economic leverage available in the outer islands, particularly in Sumatran and Sulawesi (Celebes).” Groups on these islands could then be used to influence the situation in Java, or provide a rallying point against it if it went communist. As part of this procedure, economic and military assistance to Java would be curtailed and extended to the outer regions. At a NSC meeting on 23 September, John Foster Dulles and his brother, Allen, the head of the CIA, supported the report’s proposals. Over the next few months, contact between CIA agents and rebel leaders increased, as did the financial and military resources at the disposal of the rebels.

Events in the archipelago also had a significant effect on Indonesia’s Irian policy. Perhaps with knowledge of the usefulness in domestic politics of a more fervent Irian campaign, and genuinely frustrated with a process he had never trusted, Sukarno decided before the 1957 session of the General Assembly that Indonesia would look for more militant alternatives outside the world body. It is likely that no particular plan was laid down at the time, but on the question of leaving, Sukarno remained true to his word. Following defeat in the Assembly – again under the impetus of a failure to secure

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4 ibid., p. 90. See also FRUS, Vol. XXII, ‘Southeast Asia’, pp. 400-402.
5 Kahin & Kahin, op.cit., p. 93. This document may be found in FRUS, Vol. XXII, ‘Southeast Asia’, pp. 436-40.
6 Kahin & Kahin, op.cit., pp. 93-94.
7 ibid., p. 94. See the record of this meeting in FRUS, Vol. XXII, ‘Southeast Asia’, pp. 450-53.
8 Kahin & Kahin, op.cit., p. 96. References to ‘Dulles’ will hereafter refer to John Foster unless specified otherwise.
9 ibid., p. 106.
10 For evidence in support of this interpretation, see Achmed Sukarno’s (President, Republic of Indonesia) statement in D. S. Lev, The Transition to Guided Democracy: Indonesian Politics, 1957-1959, New York, 1966, p. 33. (Lev’s monograph continues to be regarded as one of the better English-language works on Indonesian domestic politics in this period).
sufficient Latin-American support – Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr Subandrio declared that “we have no alternative course apart from action outside the United Nations.”

The fortnight following this statement was a tumultuous one in Indonesia. It is difficult to determine the exact chronology of events, but it is clear that in the days following the vote, many Dutch businesses were seized, and the most of the country’s 46,000 Netherlanders forced to leave. The degree of Government involvement in the immediate period is nebulous. Kahin and Kahin claim that Sukarno, on the day after the UN result, encouraged trade unions and the army to expropriate Dutch properties, but they provide no direct evidence for this claim. However, it is likely that both Sukarno and certain members of Cabinet actively stimulated these actions in some way, as suggested by official threats before the vote, and by contradictory remarks afterward.

At any rate, the involvement of Indonesia’s government was open within a short time. At the end of the first week of December, Cabinet ordered the closure of all Netherlands consulates, and the Foreign Ministry instructed the Netherlands mission to end “all press, cultural and military activities.” The Government also decided at this point to assume control of all Dutch interests already overrun by other organisations, and by December 13, when Nasution formally declared that the army would oversee Dutch interests under martial law, the vast bulk of Dutch property was in the hands of the state.

The Australian reaction to the events that reached their ears – and there was some confusion over exactly what was happening in Indonesia – was one of muted displeasure. On 5 December, Casey announced in the House that

Indonesia is not...improving the atmosphere for cooperation with other countries, nor is it strengthening the economic and political basis on which cooperation can be built, when it takes far-reaching and widespread action against Dutch enterprises inside Indonesia. The Netherlands has much that it can contribute towards building Indonesia and it is damaging to Indonesia’s economy and to her standing in the world to lash out at Dutchmen who have been conducting pursuits in Indonesia to the benefit of Indonesia no less than of themselves. I hope that the Indonesian Government may reconsider measures against Dutch interests there, which are creating a most unfortunate impression in other countries.

12 See Kahin & Kahin, op.cit., p. 111.
13 For comment on official Indonesian statements and contemporary assessments of Sukarno’s possible involvement, see Feith, op.cit., p. 584.
14 See cablegram 470 from L. R. McIntyre (Australian Ambassador, Jakarta), 6 December 1957, in A1838/278, 45/1/4/5/1, Pt 9, NAA. See also telephone conversation between Dr A. Y. Helmi (Indonesian Ambassador, Canberra) and Casey, 6 December 157, in the same file.
15 Feith, op.cit., p. 584.
16 See circular to New Delhi, Kuala Lumpur, Washington, and The Hague, 6 December 1957, and cablegram 470 from McIntyre, 6 December 1957, in A1838/278, 45/1/4/5/1, Pt 9, NAA.
On the next day, the Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, Dr. A. Y. Helmi, was told by Casey that the Australian Government were “very greatly disturbed” by reports of retaliation against the Dutch, whilst Spender was asked on the 7th to ensure that the Americans were “seized of the seriousness of developments in Indonesia.” Specifically, Casey was worried about violence against Dutch expatriots, and the chance of the Dutch appealing to “other countries” for aid in taking counter-measures against the Indonesians. He was also concerned about the opportunity the chaotic situation in Indonesia appeared to present for communist gains, and hoped the US might use its neutral position in the WNG dispute, firstly to appeal to Sukarno to moderate Government actions against the Dutch, and secondly perhaps to organize a series of diplomatic representations in Jakarta by various governments. After a Cabinet meeting on 11 December, during which a DEA submission on Indonesia was considered, Menzies sent a message to Dulles along similar lines to that of Casey’s.

Apart from wider concerns that it highlighted, the preliminary response in Australian circles to the explosion in Indonesia also gave some clues as to how it was thought such a phenomenon would impact upon the WNG dispute. In his telegram to Spender, Casey implied that he believed the Indonesians wanted to bully the Netherlands into discussions over WNG: “You will note”, he wrote, “the indefensible linking of compensations for nationalised property with West Irian settlement”. Sharing the Minister’s impression, Spender predictably expressed this sentiment to the Americans with little subtlety, saying to Christian Herter (US Under Secretary of State) that “it seemed obvious that [the] Indonesians were attempting to force [the] Dutch into negotiations.” The Australian Cabinet had a similar view. Menzies’ cable to Dulles observed that “Indonesia, having failed to get the requisite majority in the United Nations, appears now to be resorting to direct action; putting violent pressure upon Dutch residents in order to compel the Dutch Government to concede the Indonesian

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18 Telephone conversation between Helmi and Casey, 6 December 1957, in A1838/278, 45/1/4/5/1, Pt 9, NAA.
19 Cablegram 1266 from Casey to Spender, 7 December 1957, in A1838/278, 45/1/4/5/1, Pt 9, NAA.
20 For Spender’s demarche, see Dulles account of the Ambassador’s conversation with C. Herter (Under Secretary of State, State Department) in FRUS, Vol. XXII, 1955-57, ‘Southeast Asia’, pp. 533-34.
21 See minutes of Cabinet meeting, 11 December 1958, in A4910/XM1, Vol. 6, NAA.
22 For the Cabinet agenda, and Menzies’ cable, see Submission No. 980, in A4926/XM1, Vol. 39.
23 Cablegram 1266 from Casey to Spender, 7 December 1957, in A1838/278, 45/1/4/5/1, Pt 9, NAA.
demand for West New Guinea,\(^{25}\) A press release by Casey on 12 December essentially repeated the message, though with a little more delicacy.\(^{26}\)

These notions may have been correct. After the plenary decision, and as unrest in Indonesia was gaining momentum, Subandrio hinted that Jakarta was willing to talk with the Dutch on issues other than WNG,\(^ {27}\) and that on Irian a peaceful solution was still possible, yet he said the initiative remained with the Dutch.\(^ 28\) A State Department official told the Australians that "it was possible that his approach enjoyed Sukarno's backing", as "Subandrio was probably among those closest to Sukarno of the present Government."\(^ {29}\) Such a ploy— as the future was to prove— would not have been inconsistent with the President's character; Sukarno proved adept at operating in a calculating manner whilst expressing strong emotions. Still, it seems likely that the persecution of the Dutch in late 1957 was, as far as Sukarno was concerned, more a manifestation of barely controlled rage than another facet of the tactical game in pursuit of Irian's liberation. As Walter Crocker (Australian Ambassador, Jakarta, 1955-56) had noted in his diary in 1956, Irian was a "fixed obsession" for Sukarno,\(^ {30}\) and after failing to achieve anything in the UN for the fourth consecutive year, his patience snapped.\(^ {31}\) Dutch persons and economic interests were an accessible part of the otherwise far-flung nation that had become the focus of his antagonism, and his first thought was to strike out vengefully. Certainly, there were no carefully timed representations to outside powers for 'negotiations' (as there was to be in late 1961) to suggest that Sukarno had given much thought to the ramifications of the purge on Indonesia's options in the drive to 'liberate' Irian. On top of this, in allowing the virtual liquidation of Dutch influence in such a short period, Sukarno had lost an important bargaining chip at The Hague. He would soon have realized that a re-definition of the tactical requirements of the Irian campaign were needed.

The continuance of conflict in Indonesia between the central government and rebellious outer regions meant that it was some time before adaptations in Indonesia's Irian policy became obvious. Between December 1957 and mid-1958, Sukarno and his supporters were consumed by the struggle to prevent Indonesia's fragmentation.

\(^{25}\) See attachment to submission 980, in A4926/XM1, Vol. 39.
\(^{26}\) See The Sydney Morning Herald, 13 December 1957.
\(^{27}\) See cablegram 1466 from Washington, 4 December 1957, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 28, NAA.
\(^{28}\) See The Monitoring Digest report, 10 December 1957, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 28, NAA.
\(^{29}\) Cablegram 1463 from Washington, 3 December 1957, in A1838/278, 45/1/4/5/1, Pt 9, NAA.
\(^{30}\) Crocker, Diaries, 1 January 1956, mfm G20735.
\(^{31}\) Kahin & Kahin subscribe to the idea that Sukarno lost patience in the aftermath of the Assembly's consideration, though they do not relate this to speculation as to how, or if, he was thinking in terms of Indonesia's future campaign. See op.cit., p. 111.
Following the decision in Washington during September 1957 to back rebel leaders, the US began to provide funds, and, by November, substantial quantities of arms.\(^32\) In early December, a decision was made in principle to give active naval and air reinforcement to the dissidents.\(^33\) On top of this, the Americans encouraged the mutineers to declare independence, or a counter-government, over and against rebel voices calling for reformation rather than destruction of the central government.\(^34\) The military leaders of the rebellion responded by giving Jakarta an ultimatum on 10 February 1958, and after this was rejected, declared the establishment of the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (or PRRI) on the 15\(^{th}\).

Civil war soon followed, but the Americans were to be disappointed with the early results. In an unexpected move, Nasution, using paratroops to great effect, captured the strategic rebel base of Pekanbaru in Central Sumatra. This proved an important point from which the Government exacted substantial defeats on the PRRI over the next few weeks. In ensuring the safety of Caltex assets and personnel in the area, Nasution also prevented the intervention of US forces which had moved to Singapore.\(^35\) Later, on 17 April, Jakarta troops overran the West Sumatran town of Padang, and rebel forces on the island were forced to abandon open fighting, and adopt long-term guerilla warfare.\(^36\) They were to continue with this strategy – increasingly unsuccessfully – for three years.\(^37\)

The focus of open conflict from mid-April onward moved to Sulawesi and the islands of East Indonesia.\(^38\) Here the rebels, actively aided by the US, maintained air superiority, and inflicted significant damage on Government materiel for a month. However, starting on 10 May, a counter-offensive began that eventually effectively destroyed the rebel air force.

II

These events imposed two critical changes on the nature of the WNG dispute; one direct, the other indirect. The first was that the Americans had to face the reality that they had tried to force Indonesia away from communism, and, in failing, had if anything

\(^{32}\) ibid., pp. 120-21. Earlier accounts understandably fail to identify or explain the important active role of the US during the regional rebellion. See, for example, Haupt, op.cit., pp. 203-205.

\(^{33}\) Kahin & Kahin, op.cit., pp. 121-22.

\(^{34}\) ibid., p. 127-34.

\(^{35}\) For the opening weeks of the conflagration, see ibid., pp. 152-54.

\(^{36}\) ibid., p. 166. See also excerpt of NSC meeting, 1 May 1958, in FRUS, Vol. XVII, 1958-60, 'Indonesia', p. 130.

\(^{37}\) Kahin & Kahin, op.cit., p. 166.

\(^{38}\) For this chapter of the conflict, see ibid., pp. 169-74.
increased the communist threat. The second was that Jakarta’s victory over the rebels gave Sukarno confidence to activate the only remaining means of leverage he had with the Dutch after throwing them out and after failing in the UN – the threat of physically invading WNG.

The Eisenhower administration began to re-examine, and eventually changed, its approach to the Indonesian ‘problem’. The new US Ambassador to Indonesia, Howard Jones, who had replaced the out-of-favour John Allison in early March, played an instrumental role in this process. Soon after arriving in Jakarta – and with full knowledge of the covert aspects of US policy (unlike Allison) – Jones began to argue for a revision of US policy. On 8 April he cabled that he was “inclined [to] feel our best hope in Indonesia lies with [the] army”, because it was the “only non-powerful Communist political element on Java”. He repeated this argument on 15 April, claiming that aid to rebels in West Sumatra should be a “tactic;...a means of bringing leverage on [the] situation in Java to force [a] new political direction on [the] central government”, rather than a sole basis for policy. On May 8, Admiral Felix Stump, the commander of US forces in the Pacific, added a military voice to the doubts expressed by Jones, and he was soon joined by Admiral Laurence Frost, chief of US Naval Intelligence. Dulles – who had earlier begun to have reservations about the aggressive course that had been chosen, but had decided to persist – reacted by proposing a cease-fire between the central government and the rebels “in order to permit the anti-Communist elements in Djakarta to take the contemplated steps in attainment of their objectives which in essence are the same as those of the dissidents.” The cease-fire period would also enable Nasution to “take such action as he contemplates to bring about a change in the Cabinet and against the Communists.”

Though the first concrete effort by Dulles in a new direction, this sortie proved the product of wishful thinking; the Indonesian First Vice Prime Minister, Djuanda Kartawidjaja, rejected any notion of negotiating with the rebels. Dulles, for his part, was not prepared to accede to the counter-proposals of Jakarta authorities, or the

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39 For Howard Jones’ (US Ambassador to Indonesia) own account of the Irian question as it developed during his tenure, see Indonesia: the Possible Dream, New York, 1971, pp. 174-215.
40 Kahin & Kahin, op.cit., p. 160.
41 ibid., p. 174.
44 ibid., p. 177. For the full document, see telegram from Dulles to Jones, 13 May 1958, in FRUS, Vol. XVII, 1958-60, ‘Indonesia’, pp. 163-64.
45 See Kahin and Kahin, op.cit., pp. 177-78.
Ambassador’s appeals to “put [the] brakes on [the] rebel military effort”,\textsuperscript{46} ingenuously instructing Jones to tell Djuanda that “we will explore with Philippine and GRC [Taiwanese] governments [the] Indonesian Government’s allegations that their nationals are assisting and their territory is being used in support of the rebels”.\textsuperscript{47} He also asked Jones to convey the warning that “as in the case of the US, Philippine and GRC Governments may have difficulty in controlling [the] actions [of] their nationals abroad.” The ramification of this cautioning appears to have been continued support for rebel air superiority in eastern Indonesia, which at that point had not suffered from the concerted central government offensive that was to start a few days later.

It was not until the shooting down of a plane over the East Indonesian town of Ambon – one piloted by an American in possession of documents that provided unquestionable evidence of official US involvement\textsuperscript{48} – that Dulles opted for a reversal of US policy. In late May, it was decided that the administration’s “assets” in Indonesia were the army, and moderates within the central government. Support for the rebels was rapidly phased-out.

This change of heart, which now required substantial efforts at reconciliation, and denoted different methods of defeating communism in the archipelago, had a major impact on US policy towards WNG over the next three years. In the end, it had a decisive effect on the outcome of the dispute itself, but for the moment it was felt in a stricter neutrality. As US-Indonesian relations had declined, active support for the Dutch was seriously considered by Dulles;\textsuperscript{49} now the CIA’s failure dictated absolute avoidance of anything even suggestive of this.

Sukarno’s gravitation towards thoughts of using (or threatening to use) violence was a direct consequence of the Central Government’s military success. The Western powers had indeed been surprised by the proficiency of Nasution’s forces. Explicit evidence is difficult to procure, but Sukarno, never having Irian far from his mind, can hardly have failed to see that the achievements of his forces could have important ramifications for the WNG dispute. It is likely that the period beginning on 16 February with his return from a world tour, and ending with the demise of the rebel air force in Sulawesi in May, was a transitional one in which the notion of invading, or threatening to invade, changed from an idea to a policy. Perhaps reflecting the formation of a new

\textsuperscript{46} For the proposals of the Indonesians and also of Jones, with comments on Dulles’ response, see \textit{ibid.}, pp. 178-79. The complete telegram from Jones to Dulles, dated 15 May 1958, can be found in \textit{FRUS}, Vol. XVII, 1958-60, ‘Indonesia’, pp. 178-80.

\textsuperscript{47} Telegram from Dulles to Jones, 17 May 1958, in \textit{ibid.}, p. 185.

\textsuperscript{48} See Kahin and Kahin, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 179.

\textsuperscript{49} See, for example, Dulles to Herter, 9 September 1957, 656.9813/9-1957, RG 59, DF 1955-59, A2.
concept in the President's mind – and yet one that was not quite certain – Subandrio commented privately in March that the dispute had been put “into the icebox”, but also added that it was “almost certain” that Indonesia would not bring WNG before the UN in 1958.\(^5\)

Another event that gave Sukarno increased confidence to pursue a policy of brinkmanship over NNG was the purchase of substantial quantities of arms from the Soviet Bloc beginning in early 1958. According to a US memorandum of 28 March, an Indonesian military purchasing mission had visited Yugoslavia and other Russian-allied countries and, with $250 million at its disposal, had purchased a number of aircraft, including 30 MiG-17’s.\(^5\) Beyond this, the Americans were unsure of what else had been ordered, but it soon became clear that the purchases were extensive and continuing, and included heavy equipment.\(^5\) In September 1959, US intelligence was able to determine that hardware to the value of $229 million was acquired from communist sources in 1958. These arms had little impact on the civil war – being delivered and made operational too late\(^5\) – but they began to increase substantially the Republic’s military capabilities thereafter.

III

Because of their mutual interests, the Dutch and Australians had, like officials in Jakarta and Washington, taken care to relate events in the archipelago to WNG policy. In doing so, however, certain differences, militating against the harmony of 1957, had emerged. In particular, the Dutch were shown to be far less cautious in addressing the new situation than the Australians.

It had not taken long for the Netherlands or Australia to see that factors such as the promise of restoring Netherlands interests in the Republic in exchange for negotiations, which the Australians had held as being the Indonesian strategy at the beginning of the year, were now irrelevant. Indonesian policy was set to be played out on a new level. In late April, Hugh McClure-Smith (Australian Ambassador to the Netherlands) wrote from The Hague:

The question is being asked [here]...whether the success of amphibian operations conducted against Sumatra might not have sinister implications for Netherlands New Guinea. That it shows

\(^5\) Savingram 4 from Jakarta, 29 March 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 28, NAA. For a similar later comment by Subandrio, see cablegram 243 from McIntyre, 10 April 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
\(^5\) loc.cit.
Sharing these anxieties, authorities in Canberra had already moved to re-assess the danger of an Indonesian attack on the territory, although this process was still of a preliminary nature in late April. In early March, the Australian JIC had instructed that the 1957 paper entitled “The Likelihood of Indonesia Gaining Control of Netherlands New Guinea” be revised, and this was not completed until June.

After mentioning the “delivery of aircraft, ships and other military equipment by Communist countries to Indonesia”, McClure-Smith also raised the obvious policy question flowing from the chance of an Indonesia invasion:

I do not know whether any thought has yet been given to what our attitude would be in the event of an Indonesian attack on Netherlands New Guinea, but I would suggest that it has now become a question on which our minds should be clear to the extent that we can anticipate the governing circumstances...it may be taken for granted that, in the event of an attack on Netherlands New Guinea, the Netherlands would look to us, first and foremost, for support.

The Ambassador’s superiors were loathed to rush into a projection of Australian policy in the absence of a precise assessment by the JIC. Rather, having noted the danger, they sought (and in doing so assumed no immediate emergency would occur) to examine its probability and possible form carefully, and move from there to policy applications. Such caution over WNG was to be repeated over following weeks.

The Dutch, as foreshadowed by McClure-Smith, were not as guarded. Given that WNG was almost their sole focus in the area in the post-expulsion era, they now had little interest in the effects of their policies beyond how these might influence physical retention of the territory. They quickly began an aggressive campaign aimed at stalling, and attaining guarantees of support against, any armed attempt on WNG. On 24 April, Luns spoke to Dulles in Washington, saying that “there was a potential development” in the NNG area that “should be carefully watched”; Sukarno, “after successfully defeating the dissidents[,] might undertake military action against West New Guinea.”

Luns qualified his claim by admitting that the “Dutch Government had no evidence at the present time that Sukarno intended such a move”, but “he wished to raise it because he thought it was a possibility that [the US] should keep in mind.” He did not push for direct military backing, noting that “for the time being they had sufficient forces...to

54 McClure-Smith to Casey, 25 April 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
55 See circular note by J. S. Lynch (Co-ordinator, Joint Intelligence Staff), 5 March 1958, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 5, NAA.
take care of any attack", but he was laying the ground for later pleas for diplomatic representations to Indonesia by the US.57

In relating his conversation with Dulles to Dr E. R. Walker (Australia’s Permanent Representative at the UN) shortly afterward, Luns had a similar motive.58 Upon returning to Europe, he described his conversation with Dulles to McClure-Smith, and this time it came with a specific request, which the Ambassador conveyed to Casey:

Luns feels it would be very helpful if our Ambassador in Washington were to take an early opportunity to voice similar apprehensions to the State Department....Luns believes this might result in America taking discreet diplomatic action to head off the danger.59

A few days later, responding to comments by Dulles in a NATO meeting on the possibility of an attempted invasion of WNG,60 Luns “urged that the US make more emphatic to the Indonesian government that there would be no tolerance of an armed attack”.61 Revealing the assumption behind the request, he added that “he was convinced that if the Indonesian government knew this in advance, there would be no such attack.” Dulles replied evasively that “he was not entirely sure” such an attack would be bad because it would “expose the disregard by the Indonesian government of the...UN Charter”, and as “the permissible reaction to such an attack would be...to give a bloody nose to the Indonesian government.” Later he reacted more forcefully, telling the Dutch: “he would not issue [a public] warning to Indonesia when we have no reason to anticipate such an attack on West New Guinea. It was not good international practice to issue such a warning when there was no evidence to justify it.”62 The Secretary of State had not given up his support for the rebels in Indonesia at this stage, and he was not enamoured with the behaviour of the central government, but growing doubts over the efficacy of rebel forces made him more cautious about offending Jakarta than he might have been a few months before.

A controversy that broke shortly after this exchange brought this wariness into sharp relief. It also showed the growing incompatibility of Dutch and American

57 Consistent with this contention, Tange asked A. H. J. Lovink (Dutch Ambassador, Canberra) on 9 May if Luns’ talk with Dulles about the chance of an invasion was “a precautionary move to try to establish American support in the event of that this contingency would come about.” Lovink answered in the affirmative. See conversation between Lovink and Tange, 9 May 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
58 See cablegram 255 from Dr E. R. Walker (Australian Permanent Representative to the UN), 26 April 1955, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
59 Cablegram 111 from H. McClure-Smith (Australian Ambassador, The Hague) to Casey, 3 May 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
60 See cablegram 113 from McClure-Smith, 8 May 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
62 See conversation between Dulles and van Roijen, 13 May 1958, in ibid., p. 170.

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perspectives, which had been artificially close when Dulles’ support for the rebels had been at its apex. On 9 May, a United Press (UP) story accurately describing Dulles comments on Indonesia and WNG to the NATO meeting was printed in Jakarta papers. Jones was immediately summoned by Subandrio, who “stressed [the] seriousness” of Dulles’ reported statement, and said the “President and Prime Minister...were inclined to react at once with [a] strong statement attacking the United States.”

Dulles subsequently denied that he had made any statement in NATO as alleged by UP, and said he had made no comment on WNG. Luns told McClure-Smith that he was “profoundly shocked as well as embarrassed” by Dulles’ repudiation, that he felt it would “encourage the Indonesian Government to launch...an attack”, and that, if he was asked about Dulles’ comments in the Dutch parliament, he “would be compelled to make a statement in accordance with the facts”. On top of this, and in addition to the earlier request for an Australian warning to the US of the danger of an attack, Luns asked “if there is anything we feel we could do to put matters straight he hopes we shall do it.”

Casey’s reply to Luns’ appeals revealed that the Australians were not prepared to join Luns in his belligerent Washington campaign. In doing so, it again emphasized that the Australian Cabinet was more chary about quick decisions on WNG than the Dutch. In an important instructive cable to McClure-Smith, the Minister quickly rejected Luns’ second request:

we feel that...there would be nothing to gain by complaining strongly about Dulles’ attitude...American policy in regard to New Guinea has recently moved a long way in [the] direction desired by the Dutch and ourselves and we should all be careful not to encourage any setback in this development by saying or doing anything that might antagonise Dulles on this question.

The reasons given here for turning Luns down were spurious. American policy was not evolving in a way favourable to the Dutch-Australian position on WNG. Casey’s explanation was a ruse designed to divert Luns. Nevertheless, the cable was not disingenuous in its entirety. In fact, it provided a reason for differences in approach, and resultant cracks in the Dutch-Australian relationship, that had occurred; some of the fundamental tenets of traditional Liberal WNG policy had been rendered uncertain.

This reason was evident in Casey’s explanation of Australia’s sympathy with Dulles’

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64 See cablegram 661 from Washington, 10 May 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
65 Cablegram 117 from McClure-Smith, 11 May 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
66 Cablegram 80 from Casey to McClure-Smith, 14 May 1958, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 5, NAA.
67 Haupt, op.cit., p. 210, erroneously asserts that Australia was neither involved in aiding the Indonesian rebels, nor moved from a zealous anti-Indonesian position on WNG after the civil war.
plans for a first open attempt to begin dealing with the central government again, a plan, incidentally, that involved military aid to Nasution:

We realise there are risks that the Indonesians might use any military aid they are given by the Americans to mount an attack on Netherlands New Guinea at some future time. But we think there are greater risks in failing to take energetic action designed to check Indonesia's drift towards the Sino-Soviet bloc, which is prepared to give Indonesia aid in any case. Of course any foreseeable Indonesian Government is likely to maintain some kind of pressure on Netherlands New Guinea but a communist government would in addition constitute a threat to security in a much wider sense.

Casey's perhaps unwitting comparisons between the strategic importance of WNG and Indonesia provided a didactic on two points: firstly, Australia was starting to doubt the wisdom of a rigid buffer zone policy and, secondly, the root explanation for this, made applicable because of the irony that arms against the communists could also be used against WNG, was ostensibly anxiety over Indonesia. These phenomena raise interesting questions. Given that, throughout the 1950s, fearlessness regarding Indonesia had instructed independence from the US and UK - and that these elements were united in the conception of Australia as the power of offshore SEA (a concept which was itself manifested in the 'imperialist' behaviour of buffer zone establishment) - it must be wondered whether apparent anxiety over Indonesia was being accompanied by a loss of independence, and thus (as strongly suggested by doubts over buffer zone policy) whether belief in Australia as a middle power was waning. Put more simply, did the change in a portion of a previously united group of factors now indicate a change, or even the inversion, of the whole? Were Australian leaders now acting in accordance with the orthodox historiographical interpretation of Australia as apprehensive and dependent?

IV

It is necessary, of course, to begin by searching for evidence that seeming unease over Indonesia was real. Looking back a few months, such feeling is not difficult to find. Anxieties had been experienced on two fronts by the Menzies Government. On the first, Cabinet had become, beginning in late 1957, intensely concerned about the communist problem in Indonesia - so much so that it had eventually joined the US in its covert support of the rebels. A partial cause of this concern seems to have been, as with the Americans, the PKI's mid-year success in municipal Javanese elections, combined with

68 This was the plan embodied in Dulles telegram to Jones of 13 May 1958. See FRUS, Vol. XVII, 1958-60, 'Indonesia', pp. 163-64. It is surprising that Casey knew of Dulles' proposals to the extent demonstrated in his cable to McClure-Smith. It seems obvious from Joseph Luns' (Dutch Foreign
the central government's unwillingness to act against the communists. At an ANZUS Council meeting in October, Casey (as he recorded in his diary) "expressed [Australia's] concern at the growth of Communist influence in Indonesia and the increasingly injurious effects of Sukarno's policies." Spender, also present, asked if there was "anything the western world, especially the United States" could do to help "arrest this trend", whilst Casey specifically asked if Australia could assist. They were told by the Dulles brothers that the US had considered giving support to outer island "elements", and that although no firm decision had been made, one might soon be necessary.

It is likely Casey left from Washington impressed by the gravity with which the US was approaching the question, and this, along with a letter to Menzies from British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan, in which the "Indonesian situation" was described as "menacing", would have reinforced already-existent fears within the Australian Cabinet. Indeed, Menzies wrote to Dulles suggesting "remedial steps", including "approaches at the highest level" in Indonesia and the termination of aid. The British and the Americans wanted more drastic measures than this. Soon afterward, following a meeting in Paris between Dulles and British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd, MacMillan wrote again, warning of an imminent communist takeover in Java "if events follow their present course unchecked." Though part of the letter remains classified, it is clear that subversive action in support of the rebels was proposed – with the purpose of bringing the Jakarta Government to heel, or at least saving "the outer islands from the wreck." The Australians were invited to join an ad hoc committee of UK and US officials in Washington which would "consider policy and other matters connected with Indonesia." In reply, Menzies agreed with his counterpart's assessment of the situation – his Government believed "there is a danger that a Communist-dominated Government

Minister) dealings with the US and Australia at the time that Dutch knowledge of US policy was much more limited.

69 Casey, Diaries, 4 October 1957, MS6150, Series 4, box 29, Vol. 22, p. 97, NLA. Both Casey and Spender specifically mentioned the Javanese elections. See minutes of the ANZUS Council meeting, 4 October 1957, in FRUS, Vol. XXI, 'East Asian Security; Cambodia; Laos', p. 385.
70 ibid., pp. 385, 387.
71 ibid., pp. 386-387.
72 Harold MacMillan (British Prime Minister) to Menzies, 12 December 1957, in A6707/1, 34, NAA.
73 Casey discussed "Washington" with Menzies on 11 and 20 November, and with Menzies, Fadden, H. Holt (Australian Minister for Labour and National Service), J. McEwen (Australian Deputy Prime Minister for Trade), and J. McBride (Australian Minister for Defence) on the 21st. See entries of the same dates in Casey, Diaries, 4 October 1957, MS6150, Series 4, box 29, Vol. 22, pp. 180, 183, 184, NLA.
74 See Dulles to Menzies (Menzies to Dulles not found), 31 December 1957, in cablegram 1369 to Washington, of the same date, in A6707/1, 34, NAA.
75 MacMillan to Menzies, 20 December 1957, in A6707, 34, NAA.
76 N. Pritchard (position unidentified) to Menzies, 25 December 1957, in A1209/80, 58/5039, NAA.
might achieve power” – and with the concept of covert “dealings with dissident leaders”. From this point, the Australians were willingly dragged into the secret operations vortex, eventually providing material aid to the rebels in the military conflict with the central government.

The fears that prompted this action were extraordinary within the context Australian thinking on Indonesia since 1950, and they began to transform Australia’s perception of itself in relation to the Republic. Certainly, one of the reasons why the Australian Government had not been afraid of Indonesia was that it had viewed Southeast Asian communism through the lens of the ‘domino theory’. That is, Indonesia was unlikely to fall to communism unless the mainland states first fell one by one from north to south. This assumption was, for example, implicit in a Defence Committee report of February 1957 that asserted Australia’s “first line of...defence lies in South East Asia, and no major threat to her security can develop, nor is she likely to be a primary objective of a major Communist power, whilst Malaya is held.” Now, to the contrary, it seemed that communism might leap-frog Thailand and Malaya. This possibility, which appeared all the more real as the rebel campaign began to flounder, meant that any superiority Australia had over native Indonesian forces could (it was thought) be rendered null and void; Indonesia could become a forward base directly available to Soviet or Chinese forces and weapons systems.

Fear of Indonesia, and coincident change in Australian self-image vis-à-vis the Republic, was compounded by the realization that, even if Indonesia did not become communist, Indonesian forces were themselves set to become more of a threat. This was the second aspect of events in Indonesia that disturbed Cabinet. Not only had central government forces demonstrated greater capacity for organization than previously thought, they were, the Australians knew, about to benefit from the acquisition of arms and technical assistance from the Soviet Bloc. The belief that Australian forces would, in the foreseeable future, be far superior to those of the Indonesians had girded Canberra’s attitudes towards Jakarta since the beginning of the decade. Now this supposition was open to question as, of course, was the propriety of the confidence which it had bred.

The new anxieties over Indonesia’s political and military future were paralleled by changes, at least in the Indonesian context, in the recognized relationship between

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77 Menzies to MacMillan, 31 December 1957, in cablegram SC10 to Washington, of the same date, in A6707/1, 34, NAA.
79 See DC Report 31/1957 attached to minutes of meeting of 14 February 1957, in A1838/269, TS696/2/2, Pt 4, NAA.
Australia and its ‘great and powerful friends’. Australian policies on issues pertinent to the Republic began to reflect a greater degree of dependence than they had before. Participation in the CIA-led Indonesian operation was a first practical demonstration of this. Such cooperative dependence would presumably have been sought in some form even if the narrowing of Australian and Indonesian capabilities had started to occur on its own – for superiority had been a basis of independence – but this was all the more so with the appearance in ‘Australia’s’ area of one of the ‘big’ problems. Communist expansionism had in the past been apparently confined to mainland SEA, and managed by the US and UK within that region. Now that it had come to be seen as a danger in Indonesia, greater British and American superintendence of the Indonesian region, at the expense of Australian independence, had to follow.

Putting growing Australian perturbations over communism and Indonesia’s medium-term military potential together with, on one hand, growing dependence on the US and UK in dealings with the archipelago, and, on the other, doubts over the WNG buffer, it is possible to say that partial breakdown in the belief in Australia as the preeminent power south of Singapore had occurred. It must be judged partial because dependence in terms of WNG had not yet been demonstrated, and nor had the notion of a buffer been abandoned. In other words, Australian foreign policy in SEA had seemingly entered a phase in which it was caught between ‘old’ and ‘new’ perceptions of Australia’s status.
Chapter 5: Australian Attempts to Balance Interests in WNG and Indonesia, May-August 1958

I

For the remainder of May 1958, and a number of weeks following, the intensity of Dutch lobbying was a major feature of activity in Western circles on WNG. Luns, whose methods in the international sphere were markedly similar to those of Spender, was relentless in his campaign for deterrents and guarantees. With reference to Australia, the need to continue responding again resulted in indications of the state of WNG policy. There was also an important extent to which this imperative compelled distillation of that policy.

The Casey to McClure-Smith telegram of 14 May had made it clear that Australia was not to talk to the Dutch with only a negative voice. The Minister clarified that there was no consideration of abandoning them. Approval was given to Luns’ suggestion that the US be made aware of the danger of an attack on NNG: “We have instructed [Ambassador to the US, Howard] Beale again to represent to Dulles the particular interests which the Dutch and ourselves have in relation to Netherlands New Guinea and you may inform Luns of this.”1 Casey also assured McClure-Smith that while Canberra thought current events in Jakarta could well decide the future of the whole of Indonesia and that we therefore cannot afford to see any chance of promoting favourable developments...being neglected, Australia,] at the same time[...had sought repeatedly to impress on the Americans our view that they and we should seek concrete assurances before delivering substantial military aid to [the] central government.

In spite of this ongoing empathy, the tension in the bilateral relationship would not dissipate. The next ‘issue’ again grew out of a Dutch initiative. Luns said he was grateful for the promise of representations by Beale,2 but proffered yet another request. In preparing the ground, he said “with great emphasis” that the Dutch would resist any attack on NNG “with arms to their full capacity”, but that the outcome, both military and in terms of Dutch public opinion, could be “vitally affected by the attitude of their friends”.3 He went on: “Since we had consistently maintained the importance of Netherlands New Guinea to our security, had not the time come for staff talks and an

1 Howard Beale, previously a Cabinet minister, replaced Spender as Ambassador in early 1958. In conversation with Dulles, Beale apparently responded to the Secretary’s observation that an attack on WNG was unlikely by asking if the success of the central government in Sumatra “might not change the picture”. This was ostensibly Beale’s only reference to WNG during the talk. See conversation between Dulles and Beale, 22 May 1958, in FRUS, Vol. XVII, 1958-60, ‘Indonesia’, pp. 191-93.
2 Cablegram 120 from McClure-Smith to Casey, 15 May 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
3 Cablegram 121 from McClure-Smith to Casey, 15 May 1958, in A 1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 5, NAA.
exchange of technical information between Australian and Dutch fighting services on a strictly secret basis with no political commitments?” This approach was in accord with the second aspect of the two-pronged Dutch push for deterrence and contingency planning. The Dutch Foreign Minister had had some success in building an atmosphere that would achieve the first, and he was determined to have options in place should this fail.

In October 1957, the Australians had agreed to a Dutch proposal to exchange technical information on WNG, especially in connection with compatibility of military equipment and the use of base facilities, but, as H. M. Loveday of the Defence Liaison Branch (DEA) noted, this was “a good deal less than Luns’ present proposal for “staff talks””. Consequently, the response from Canberra was tentative. Tange instructed that Luns be told his idea was under “intensive examination”, but that no definite reply could be given until Australia had finished with its own assessment of the Indonesian threat. Tange’s reticence proved to be an omen; the issue of staff talks was to become one of the main bones of contention between Australia and the Netherlands, though this outcome was not immediately obvious.

A second specific disagreement – and like staff talks, this too was rooted in differences over views on the importance of Indonesia – emerged at the same time. In a manifestation of the thaw between the Americans and the Indonesian central government, an agreement had been signed on 22 May whereby the US would provide the Indonesians with 35,000 tons of rice, and with a number of small arms and aircraft parts. The Drees Government was fearful of the repercussions of this on WNG security. McClure-Smith was told that “the Netherlands must take account of the fact that besides receiving American arms, Indonesia was also receiving heavy military aid from Communist countries and that this greatly increased the danger of an attack on Netherlands New Guinea.” The Dutch, who heard about the deal via the press, were also seemingly incensed at what they saw as a breach of an earlier promise by Dulles. Netherlands officials charged that Dulles had given assurances “that there was no question of delivering arms to the Sukarno regime”, and that the Netherlands would be consulted in advance if there was to be an alteration of policy. Dulles seems to have

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1 H. M. Loveday (Defence Liaison Branch, DEA) to Tange, 19 May 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA. Loveday also observed that the Dutch had not in fact pursued their initiative.
2 Cablegram 96 from Tange to McClure-Smith, 29 May 1958, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 5, NAA.
4 Cablegram 132 from McClure-Smith, 27 May 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
5 loc.cit.
said he would provide warning, but apparently also told van Roijen on 13 May that although the US “had no present intention of supplying arms,...he could not rule out the possibility...if it seemed justified from the point of view of achieving common objectives.”9 At any rate, in a terse meeting with van Roijen on the 27th (later described by A. H. J. Lovink (Dutch Ambassador, Canberra) as an “explosion”),10 he said it “had not occurred to the [State] Department that the Dutch would consider these transactions as arms deliveries to Indonesia,” and added that the US did not, for the moment, plan on giving Indonesia military equipment.11

As hinted by Dutch distortion of Dulles’ pledges, the Netherlands Government, though genuinely worried about the direction of US policy, was not beyond making capital from an unpleasant situation. Before the Dulles-van Roijen meeting was cabled back to the Netherlands, Luns asked that Australia make a public statement that it would support the Dutch in the event of an attack, and that Australia support representations in Washington.12 He could also not resist using US moves as a means of exerting further pressure over staff talks, saying he thought the delivery of arms would increase the danger of an invasion, and that Lovink had been told on 23 May to follow up his earlier proposal.

The Australians would not humour the Dutch. No appeal was made to Dulles in Washington, and on 26 May Tange had reiterated his earlier message on staff talks by telling Lovink that it “would be several weeks before an Australian view was available.”13 Casey must have supported Tange’s comments in a conversation with Lovink on 30 May.14 Moreover, the Menzies Government was by no means willing to make a public commitment to the defence of WNG when it had not even decided on either the scale of the threat to the territory or whether to go ahead with exploratory talks between Dutch and Australian servicemen.

The ruffling of the Dutch-Australian relationship caused by these disagreements was increased by a further discussion between van Roijen and Dulles on 27 May. Apparently in an attempt to cool Dutch tempers, Dulles candidly explained America’s

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9 This is the account of J. G. Mein (Director, Office of SW Pacific Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Department) as transmitted in cablegram 689 from Washington, 14 May 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
10 See conversation between Plimsoill and Lovink, 10 June 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
12 See cablegram 132 from McClure-Smith, 27 May 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
13 Cablegram 97 to The Hague, 29 May 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
14 This talk is mentioned in Casey to McClure-Smith, 3 June 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA, but no record of the conversation has been found.
Indonesia policy, admitting to US involvement in support of the rebels on Sumatra and Sulawesi, and remarking how the demise of the dissident movement had led them to decide "the moment had come when we should try to influence Indonesian military and civilian leaders." In this context, he mentioned that the US, the UK, and Australia had consulted with each other, and had agreed that this was the best course. This seems to have annoyed Luns, who accused the Australians of a lack of "complete frankness"—a charge to which Casey declined to respond, feeling that doing so "might suggest a guilty conscience". A day earlier, Tange had pinpointed the overall tenor of the Netherlands-Australian connection, saying to the British High Commissioner that "Australia looked like having some rough times in our relations with the Dutch as a result of our supporting a policy which contained some risks".

II

The intensity of Dutch pressure on Australia increased over the following eight weeks. Netherlands officials were aware that Australian authorities were assessing various aspects of the WNG problem anew, a process that they knew would have a critical effect on the limits of Dutch Government policy. From an Australian perspective, this pressure was a major factor stimulating a review in August of WNG policy in its entirety. Combined with other anxieties that were soon explicitly broached, it forced Australian policy-makers to tie together the implications of the changes late 1957 and 1958 had brought, and to move towards a more comprehensive response. This process, though not completed until early 1959, compelled members of both the civil service and Cabinet to push on with the alterations to Australian policy that had been in their infancy in the first half of the year, and embark on ones that had played little part in past Liberal Government thinking.

The central tactic of the Dutch crusade involved constant representations in Canberra through their Embassy. On 10 June, Lovink questioned Plimsoll on the progress of Australia's re-evaluation of the situation and the associated issue of staff talks. He received an indefinite answer, to which he commented that "he would be glad to have an indication of our timing as soon as we were in a position to tell him, because the Dutch would like to be able to alert suitable officers to come out here to talk

16 Cablegram 101 from Casey to McClure-Smith, 3 June 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
17 Conversation between Tange and Lord Carrington (UK High Commissioner, Canberra), 2 June 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
18 Conversation between Plimsoll and Lovink, 10 June 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
to us.” A complementary alternative to this method, which appeared to be an attempt to coerce through the presumption of a positive answer, was the painting of a dark picture of the repercussions of a negative answer. Ten days after Lovink’s meeting with Plimsoll, J. H. Insinger (First Secretary of the Netherlands Embassy) told J. P. Quinn (head, South and SEA Branch, DEA):

If the Netherlands did not receive from its friends and allies the support that it could reasonably expect, a reaction might well set in. The potential forces against the...New Guinea policy were strong and if expenditure or a markedly increased defence effort in the territory they could well become prominent and effective. The Netherlands was engaged in extensive reclamation works to cope with its continuing growth of population and with the loss of its investments in Indonesia...could no longer afford to pay out money on an increasing scale to maintain a piece of territory at the far end of the world.19

This campaign on two fronts continued into July. At a reception early in the month, Lovink cornered Plimsoll, claiming that he was “very worried about the security of New Guinea”, and that the Indonesians might “try to land a few men and proclaim a government” in the territory.20 Requesting an interview with Casey, he added that “he hoped to be able to report to Luns...that, if Indonesian military action occurred in respect of Dutch New Guinea, the Netherlands would not be left on its own.” No doubt for genuine reasons, but probably also to give their diplomatic offensive more punch, the Netherlands Ministry of Defence had also announced on July 1 that WNG would be militarily reinforced in the near future.21

Partially in response to an imminent demarche by Lovink, but also as a general preliminary investigation of the dispute in its post 1957-58 context, Casey took a submission on WNG and related problems to Cabinet. This paper (which was accepted by the Ministers)22, along with a June Cabinet meeting at which WNG had been discussed without memorandum, both confirmed and further uncovered the pressures that the Ministers believed they were subject to over WNG.

The agendum demonstrated, as Casey’s cable to The Hague had, that fears of Indonesian communism were affecting the solidity of traditional WNG policy. Support for the American push to bolster Nasution was prominently affirmed, in spite of acknowledgement that the decision to furnish Indonesia with arms greatly disturbed the Dutch. The willingness of the Australians to break with the Dutch, in favour of a group

19 Conversation between J. P. Quinn (Head, South and South East Asia Branch, DEA) and J. H. Insinger (First Secretary, Netherlands Embassy, Canberra), 20 June 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
20 Conversation between Plimsoll and Lovink, 4 July 1958, in A1838/269, TS696/3/3, Pt 1, NAA.
21 See Submission No. 1281, 8 July 1958, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/2/1, Pt 1, NAA.
22 For the ministerial reaction, see Casey to Tange, 9 July 1958, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/2/1, Pt 1, NAA. For the agendum, see Submission No. 1281, 8 July 1958, in the same file.
of Indonesians, and perhaps at cost to Netherlands morale, was a testimony to how worried Cabinet had become regarding Indonesian communism.

The two meetings also indicated that fear of Indonesia was impinging on WNG policy in another way; the second strand of Australian anxiety arising from 1957-58 – that of the expanded capability of native Indonesian forces – was being seen as increasingly relevant to NNG. In spite of the absence of a JIC report, the Ministers judged that the risk of an Indonesian attack on the territory was real. This was a problem in a policy sense because there were now suspicions that the defeat of such a move was not a fait accompli. In discussion on 9 July (as Casey related to Tange) “One or two Ministers” suggested “if it was that agreed Dutch New Guinea was essential to Australian security, should we not go the whole hog and support them, with force of arms if necessary?” Casey replied “that this was right enough, except for the fact that we had practically nothing to support them with” – a view backed by John McBride (Minister for Defence). Menzies seems to have been sceptical that Australia had “nothing”, but there apparently existed general agreement that the Dutch and Australians would have considerable difficulty repelling any attack alone. This sentiment expressed itself in the extreme caution with which any military commitments to the Dutch were treated; on 3 June, for example, Cabinet had indicated that a decision on staff talks “would require the most careful prior consideration”.

Beyond Indonesian communism and the chance of violence, there were clues in the submission to three other factors the Ministers believed had to be considered in connection with WNG. In a part on Australia’s relations with the Netherlands, Casey commented on their “sharp disappointment” over a decision not to allow more KLM flights to Australia, and that Australia would probably not be able to give military support to the Dutch to the extent they wished. He continued: “I think the time has come for us to try hard to give the Dutch something [sic] that they ask for, or to do something positive to help them, because it is in our direct interest to assist to rally public opinion behind the Netherlands Government in standing firm on Netherlands New Guinea.” This emphasized that Casey (and in open discussion it was obvious that he was not alone) still assumed that WNG was strategically central to Australian defence; it remained a definite “interest”. Secondly, it drew attention to the fact that the Australians realized Dutch resolve was not without its limitations. They might give up, which

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23 In an appendix, Casey quoted a cable by McIntyre, in which the Ambassador said an invasion was unlikely, but by no means impossible.

24 Casey to Tange, 9 July 1958, in A1838/276, 3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.

25 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 3 June 1958, in A4910, Vol. 7, NAA.
would, in an era when Australian administration of the territory was politically impossible, probably mean some form of Indonesian penetration. This fear was to become more prominent in Canberra over the coming weeks.

A penultimate pressure was that many within Cabinet felt Australia had a moral obligation to stand by the Dutch. Canberra may have used the Dutch administration as a proxy for its own presence in WNG, and at times bullied them into staying, but now that this had been done, it would be dishonourable to rapidly pull away from them. Reflecting this sense of duty, Menzies said emphatically during general dialogue on the 9th that “the Dutch cannot be allowed to stew in their own juice”.26

A final burden on Cabinet, and not mentioned in the submission, was ever-present concern over Australian public opinion. In April, the fourth Gallup poll of the decade on WNG had shown that well over half of those with an opinion on the issue favoured either direct Australian ownership of the territory or an Australian trusteeship.27 Another third favoured a United Nations solution, but only 10% of those with a view wanted Indonesian control over WNG. The Government would have been particularly wary of these figures given that federal elections were due in November.

The six pressures, when related to each other, can be seen to be of two categories. The first – including the need for moral support for the Dutch, the strategic importance of WNG, and public opinion – pushed Australian policy in its traditional direction. The second group, on the other hand, and involving fears of an attack plus those of Indonesia becoming communist, was pulling Australia away from a protectionist policy for WNG, and towards concentration on the Indonesian problem. (Anxieties over Dutch determination had the ability to pull either way). Before 1958, this contradiction had not existed, at least in terms of Australian convictions.

Cabinet’s response to these two diverging forces was to try to address both, without giving up either – even if this meant foregoing ideal methods in each context. Support for arms aid to Jakarta was continued – for the sake of anti-communist elements – but on the condition that it was limited on the basis of type (that suited to internal security only) and quantity – and this was to encourage and appease the Dutch, pacify the electorate, and minimize the chance of invasion. For similar reasons, the Netherlands were to be supported both diplomatically and materially through exchanges of intelligence and Australian pressure for an international atmosphere of deterrence.28

26 Casey to Tange, 9 July 1958, in A1838/276, 3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
27 See Atkin and Wolfers, op.cit., p. 204.
28 For references to the particular objectives mentioned in this and the previous sentence (apart from the logic behind them), see minutes of Cabinet meeting, 3 June 1958, in A4910, Vol. 7, NAA. Submission
but they were at this stage to be given no military promises, for these would be incommensurate with Australia’s capabilities. Cabinet had not made final decisions, but in June and July, a ‘balancing act’ policy, with its roots in the Indonesian crisis of 1957-58, and first hinted at by Casey in May, emerged strongly.

III

This policy, and Australian activity over WNG which had followed Casey’s cable, were consistent with what was earlier identified as the real, yet partial, decline of Australia’s self-perceived role as a middle power. Hesitation over Luns’ requests after 14 May, which again heightened tensions with the Dutch, drew further attention to diminishing confidence over Indonesia, and accentuated dependence on the US (at least in terms of coping with the Republic). Nevertheless, this occurred against the background of Casey’s assurance that the Government would continue to represent Dutch and Australian interests to the Americans – and this showed that an independent mindset on WNG had not been discarded.

The finely balanced policy that came to prominence in June and July, and which crystallized the Australian response to a number of the specific issues raised by Luns, was of course the clearest illustration of the tangible but incomplete changes to the way that Australians viewed the status of their country. The Australians felt constrained to pay heed to the threat from Indonesia, and to the need to secure help from the US, in an area of foreign policy that had previously testified to Australia’s ‘imperial’ approach to offshore SEA. Still, it is notable that these limitations were not considered to be of a magnitude great enough to cancel out the influence of other factors. In other words, the Menzies Government did not yet think the Indonesians were so dangerous, and dependence on the US and UK so necessary, that it had to ignore the inherent value of WNG, obligations to the Dutch, and Australian public opinion.

This said, it must also be recognised that both fear and dependence, and the commensurate rate of decline in faith in Australia’s status, had increased since May. Obvious dependence on the US had before been confined to operations within the Indonesian sphere. Now, however, one of the generalized fears originally linked to the Indonesian civil war – that Jakarta’s forces would in themselves become a threat – had become germane to WNG, and this meant defence of the buffer zone, previously

No. 1281, 8 July 1958, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/2/1, Pt 1, NAA, and Casey to Tange, 9 July 1958, in the same file.
Australia’s prerogative as an ‘imperial’ power, was now thought to depend, to a large extent, on the attitude of the US. Indeed, during debate on 9 July, Menzies said that “the United States were the only people who could either deter (or combat) Indonesian aggression against Dutch New Guinea if it took place.”29 This assessment of Dutch-Australian strength, or lack of it, meant that any military plans for WNG were believed to be heavily constrained by American policy on the issue of invasion. Such thoughts were a far cry from the autonomous tenor of the Australian outlook in past years.

IV

Many of the methods of Cabinet’s ‘balancing act’ were on display during Casey’s talk to Lovink. It was an appointment that also revealed in stark terms the central aim of Luns’ long line of requests.30 Lovink, mirroring Luns’ penchant for drama throughout the meeting, began by pointing again to what he portrayed as the very real danger of an invasion, mixing this observation with the threat that the Netherlands Government would probably ditch current WNG policy if Australia’s military and diplomatic backing was not forthcoming. Then, as expected, he specifically asked “whether he could inform his government that in the event of an attack, it would receive immediate military support from Australia.” On top of this, he intimated that, for the sake of deterrence, this should be publicly announced. In reply, Casey tried to both soothe and elude. He said Australia “regarded such an attack as out of the question”, though if one of the kind envisaged by the Dutch occurred, “this would extend into something of very much greater consequence, with which neither the Netherlands nor Australia could cope.” “Hence”, he went on, “the importance of engaging the support of other allies – and in the Pacific the United States was the major power.”31

The Dutch had not fully grasped, or did not want to accept, that Cabinet’s attitude over WNG was changing. They were naturally happier with the situation, which had prevailed for most of the decade, in which the Menzies Government had shown scant regard for Indonesian capabilities, and been prepared to conflict with the US over Indonesia policy in order to protect the status quo in WNG. Unsurprisingly, then, Lovink by implication rejected Casey’s presentation of the US position as critical. He contended that what the US did would be influenced by its policy of neutrality. What

29 Casey to Tange, 9 July 1958, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/2/1, Pt 1, NAA.
30 See Tange’s record of conversation between himself, Lovink, and Casey, 10 July 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
31 For a more detailed account of what Lovink was told of the significance of Australia’s connection with the US, see Casey’s record of the talk in his letter to Menzies, 11 July 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
was important for the Netherlands was whether the Dutch could rely on Australian support “in deeds as well as words.” The Ambassador remarked that, from what Casey had said, he would assume the Dutch would “stand alone” if an attack took place in the foreseeable future, and that if any military consultations or moves for active support were to be forthcoming, these would only be taken at the time.

Casey made a number of positive noises in response, but again would not assume any obligations. He argued that the US rejoinder to an attack would be very different to that demonstrated in a UN situation; “it would be bound to respond.” Meanwhile, Australia would use its “rather special relationship” with the US to ensure a clearer understanding of the serious situation presented by an attempted invasion. On the issue of a guarantee, Casey said he could not give a direct reply, though, echoing Menzies, “he did not believe that anyone could envisage the Dutch being left to stew in their own juice.” Concerning the problem of an exchange of intelligence, the Minister noted the topic was still under review,32 whilst Tange added that the delays had nothing to do with the fact that the third country was Indonesia. They were merely those to be expected with any intelligence problem.

A conversation between Menzies and Lovink at a dinner (ironically for Spender and his wife) on the same day again exemplified the tactics necessitated by the delicate temper of Australian policy. After outlining Casey’s comments – which Menzies affirmed as “a very proper account of the result of a Cabinet discussion”33 – Lovink intimated that he would send a negative report to Luns. Menzies discouraged this, and suggested he should attempt to describe Australia’s feelings accurately to The Hague. In what was cold comfort for the Dutch, he also said:

[You] must not expect Australia to be entering into absolute commitments on so far reaching a matter...the determining factor in this matter might be the American attitude...we should all use such influence as we had to persuade the United States to lay a cool and warning hand on the Indonesian brow.34

Perhaps sensing scepticism on Lovink’s part, he continued unconvincingly: “if it should turn out that the United States took quite definitely a view unfavourable to Dutch and Australian interests in New Guinea, a state of affairs would then arise which we would be, of course, willing to discuss and consider.” This evidently had little impact on the

32 Lovink also referred to the “lack of response to the request for military consultations”, but Casey did not directly respond to this.
33 On 9 July, Cabinet had agreed that a paper entitled “Notes for talk with Dutch Ambassador” could be used as the basis for Casey’s discussions with him. See Cabinet minutes in A4910, Vol. 7, NAA.
34 Menzies to Casey, 14 July 1958, in teleprinter message from Casey to Tange, 15 July 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
Ambassador, who told Plimsoll on 14 July that his talk with Casey would "cause consternation" in The Hague—hardly an encouraging sign in the early navigation of Australia's new course.

To gain a more comprehensive appreciation of the situation, six papers were prepared between June and early August by Defence, in cooperation with the DEA, on the Indonesia-WNG problem. The intention was to use these in the construction of a joint submission to Cabinet. The papers, dealing explicitly with many of the problems pulling Australian policy in opposite directions, led not only to a considered and coherent bureaucratic response to them, but to a firm and clearly defined Cabinet position. More specifically, the memoranda confirmed recent changes in Australian policy in more ways than one; they added an articulate and independent voice to a number of the untested assumptions evinced by Cabinet; they bred recommendations (as embodied in a joint submission) that essentially endorsed the tactical approach of the previous weeks; and these proposals in turn resulted in the most wide-ranging Cabinet decisions on WNG of 1958—decisions which nevertheless were consistent with preliminary choices of June and July.

Of the six papers, the most important were a review of WNG's strategic significance, a report on the importance of Indonesia to Australian and regional defence, and an assessment of the likelihood of a successful Indonesian attack on the territory. An estimate of the military measures which could be taken in response to such an attack was also of note. The first, created under the auspices of the JPC as in 1956, proved a considerably diluted version to its previous form. C. T. Moodie (Assistant Secretary, Division 7, DEA) highlighted for Tange some of the central differences in a memorandum. Focussing on the conclusions, he remarked:

The holding of Australian New Guinea is no longer defined as "vital" but as the "final defence in depth of the Australian mainland" and thus "a primary objective of our defence strategy to hold". Indonesian control of Netherlands New Guinea is no longer defined as "strategically unacceptable" but as a "grave potential strategic threat". In the body of the Appreciation, again, such words as "vital" have been omitted and such words as "most important" substituted.

35 Conversation between Plimsoll and Lovink, 14 July 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 29, NAA.
36 See cover note by the Defence Liaison Branch (DEA), 15 August 1958, in A1838/269, TS696/3/3, Pt 1, NAA.
37 C. T. Moodie (Assistant Secretary, Division Seven, DEA) to Tange, 18 June 1958, in A1838/269, TS696/3/3, Pt 1, NAA.
These alterations flowed from the conviction that Australia had few resources to commit to the defence of WNG, and apparently from fears in the JPC over the threat of a communist Indonesia. Moodie noted: “In general I should say that the J. P. C. were somewhat influenced by political considerations in this Appreciation and very much preoccupied with the practical problems of giving military support to the Dutch in what they say is the present state of our defences.” It is notable that judgements on the strategic importance of WNG were affected by observations regarding Australia’s ability to defend itself and its interests in the area. This squared with Cabinet thinking, in which changes in the strategic significance of WNG were symptomatic of feelings of fear and vulnerability associated with Indonesia.

In a meeting on 19 June, and later out of session, the Defence Committee endorsed the JPC study without amendment.38 Therefore, the official Defence Department view on the significance of WNG was more qualified than it had been for most of the 1950s; NNG was important to Australia, but not “vital”. On top of this, and revealing that the higher levels of Defence had also come to believe that a solution had to be found for the dispute, the Committee directed that the JPC make a “detailed examination...of the political and military implications of “a neutralised Netherlands New Guinea.”” Tange has recently implied that the problem with the generals was that they did not “think”.39 If by this he meant that they were unwilling to look at alternatives to the status quo, such an opinion failed to apply after mid-1958.

Another of the estimates written at this time – and one which had implications for the relative significance of WNG, and supported Cabinet’s feeling that a communist Indonesia was a danger – was that of the “Importance of Indonesia to Australian and Regional Defence”. This DC report argued unequivocally that Indonesia was vital in both respects. A central conclusion of the Committee was that the archipelago, lying between Australia and mainland SEA, and astride the NW approaches, was “of great strategic importance to Australia and constitutes a most important factor in both Australian and regional Defence.”40 The basis of this view was explained in the findings that followed. First, the “size of Indonesia’s population and her economic possibilities” was seen to “endow her with a long term potential far in excess of her present importance.” Second, a “hostile” Indonesia was deemed capable of impairing

38 Minutes of Defence Committee meetings of 19 June 1958 and out of session, dated 30 June 1958, in A1838/269, TS696/3/3, Pt 1, NAA.
39 Speaking of DEA frustrations in 1956 with the Defence Committee, Tange said: “What we wanted these Generals to do, first of all, was to think.” Interview with Tange, 23 June 1998.
40 Defence Committee report, “The Importance of Indonesia to Australian and Regional Defence”, July 1958, attached to DC minutes of 28 July 1958, in A1838/269, TS696/3/8, NAA.
Australia’s relations with other Asian countries. Third and fourth – and the obvious focus as Indonesia became increasingly embroiled in the Cold War – it was stressed that

A Communist-controlled Indonesia would result in the establishment of a Communist state within a few hundred miles of Australia and assist the growth of Communist and neutralist sentiment throughout South East Asia. Indonesia could provide bases from which external Communist forces could operate against Australia and other neighbouring countries and communications within the region. In particular an air and submarine threat could develop very quickly especially if Indonesia were Communist or supported by the Communist bloc.

It was admitted Indonesia’s current capacities were limited, but the Committee was careful to point out that this situation was not, of necessity, permanent: “In the long term, Indonesia could pose a serious threat to Australia in view of her potential and the possibility of support from the Communist bloc. With large-scale military aid, she could build up a substantial military capability which could well exceed that envisaged for the Australian defence forces.” Finally, and in summary, it was contended that the “maintenance of a friendly or neutral Indonesia is of great importance to Australian and regional defence.” Use of the phrase “great importance” placed Indonesia at least on a par with WNG regarding Defence’s definition of strategic significance, and spoke of an outlook that was very different from previous years. The assumption had then been that Indonesia would remain, for the foreseeable future, a second-rate power. Projections were now quite different.

On 28 July, the Defence Committee considered the JIC’s assessment of the likelihood of Indonesia gaining control of WNG before the end of 1960. Militarily speaking, the Intelligence Committee had concluded that each arm of the Indonesian forces was limited by sheer lack, and obsolescence, of equipment. They would therefore not, in the period under review, be able to embark upon the sort of comprehensive operations necessary for capturing all of NNG. Still, it was thought the Dutch were not capable of defending the territory in its entirety, and that the Indonesians had the ability to mount a landing of battalion strength in the south and south-west. Such a lodgement would, it was argued, take the Dutch an estimated four weeks to eliminate. In such a situation (and this conclusion was based on a section provided by the DEA), Indonesia would not be forced to leave by the UN. Rather, a resolution might be passed calling for

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41 For relevant past assessments, see JPC report No. 29/1956, compiled at meetings of 2, 10, and 17 May 1956, endorsed by the Chiefs of Staff (see memorandum by Tange, 1 June 1956, in same file), in A1838/269, TS696/3/2, Pt 2, NAA. See also an earlier Defence Committee version of the “Importance of Indonesia to Australian and Regional Defence”, DC report No. 31/1957, compiled at a meeting of 14 February 1957, in A1838/269, TS696/2/2, Pt 4, NAA.

42 The JIC report (JIC (M) (58) 42, July 1958) can be found in A1838/269, TS666/42.

43 See memorandum by Plimsoll, 4 June 1958, and attachment, in A1838/269, TS666/42.
a cease-fire, and even negotiations – an outcome that would “be detrimental to Dutch interests”, and “might result in the Dutch having to relinquish control of the territory in some measure.” In a similarly negative vein, the JIC decided that Indonesia might gain a degree of control over WNG if Dutch policy underwent modification. Such a modification was seen as likely if the Dutch thought there was a “growing Indonesian military or politico-military threat which could not be countered adequately by political and military means and/or that countries strategically interested in the maintenance of Dutch sovereignty were not prepared to contribute effectively to the Defence of the territory.”

The Defence Committee did not differ from the main JIC findings (although it constructed an alternative set of conclusions that more succinctly expressed the aim of the paper). The basic tenor of Defence opinion on the matter, therefore, was that the main danger before the end of 1960 was not a major assault on WNG with the aid of Bloc weaponry, but a minor incursion followed by diplomatic action. Additionally, a slide in Dutch confidence could allow the Indonesians a foothold. These postulations confirmed those earlier expressed in Cabinet, but the judgement of Indonesia’s military capabilities was more subtle. Menzies had said baldly on 9 July that the US was the only power able to deter and combat Indonesian aggression. On the other hand, the DC had decided that in the immediate future an Indonesian invasion would be dangerous, not due to overwhelming superiority, but because of Jakarta’s ability to combine a minor and temporary military success with a favourable political situation at the UN.

A complementary paper by the Chiefs of Staff Committee on “Military Measures Which Could be Taken in the Event of An Indonesian Attack on Netherlands New Guinea” confirmed this appreciation. It also provided another qualification to views demonstrated in Cabinet – this time in connection with Casey’s claim that, practically speaking, Australia had nothing with which to back the Dutch up. The Chiefs thought that Australia and the Netherlands could, without the support of allies, and with

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44 Emphasis original.
45 Conclusions of the Defence Committee, July 1958, attached to minute of DC, 28 July 1958, in A1838/269, TS666/42.
46 See Casey to Tange, 9 July 1958, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/2/1, Pt 1, NAA.
47 This view was supported by a paper entitled “Indonesian Military Capability up to 1960”. The basic verdict of this study, as reflected in its conclusions as revised by the DC, was that, in the period under review, Indonesian forces would be particularly limited in terms of large-scale operations, but might be able to engage in operations on a smaller scale. See this report, and the revised DC conclusions, entitled JIC (M) (58) 40 (Revise), July 1958, in A1838/269, TS666/40, NAA.
48 Report by Chiefs of Staff Committee (CSC), “Military Measures Which Could Be Taken in the Event of an Indonesian Attack on Netherlands New Guinea”, July 1958, attached to CSC minutes of 24 and 30 July 1958, in A7941/2, 18, Pt 1, NAA.
careful cooperative preparation with the Dutch, repel an Indonesian invasion. Nevertheless, they would not be able to prevent an initial lodgement, and Australian forces could suffer from serious deficiencies without allied help. The existence of the first, moreover, would mean that Australian intervention would have to be “prompt and rapidly effective”. The time frame enabling effective intervention would be “a few weeks at most”, and the report warned that UN calls for a cease-fire could take place within hours. On the whole, the study implied that unless Australia and the Netherlands were acting within an ANZAM and ANZUS context, a small Indonesian force could land and, though this could be destroyed with time, it was reasonably likely that political events would prevent its elimination, allowing the Indonesians a permanent foothold on the island.

Overall, the papers made some important qualifications to the judgements of Cabinet, especially in relation to the question of an Indonesian invasion, but in general the assumptions and intuitive conclusions of the Ministers were upheld. West New Guinea remained important relative to Indonesia, but because of the rising threat of Indonesian communism, and the problems that would be encountered defending the island, Indonesia’s significance, and Australia’s need for US and UK help, had increased greatly. Dutch resolve, furthermore, was mentioned as a potentially critical extraneous factor.

VI

On 12 August, Defence and the DEA brought their joint submission on WNG to Cabinet. Unsurprisingly, this memorandum, and the result of its scrutiny, closely reflected the dove-tailing of essential public service and executive opinion. Divided into four basic sections, the paper incorporated an introduction, one segment on the external affairs aspects of Australian policy on WNG and Indonesia, another on military facets, and a final part embodying general observations and recommendations. The introduction noted that NNG had been brought before Cabinet again for two reasons; firstly, the chance of an Indonesian attack was “now less remote than had previously been assessed”, and secondly the Netherlands had proposed staff talks, and asked for assurances regarding an attempted invasion. Describing Cabinet talks in June and July

49 ANZAM was a command structure aimed at defence of the Australia, New Zealand, and Malaya area, and was operated by the Australian, New Zealand, and British governments.
50 Submission No. 1312 can be found in A1838/269, TS696/3/3, Pt 1, NAA, or A4926, Vol. 54, NAA.
as "preliminary", it was thought timely for Cabinet to look at Australian WNG policy as a whole." This, in turn, involved three fundamental questions:

How much importance do we attach to the Dutch remaining in western New Guinea? What are the offsetting disadvantages of their remaining? Is there any desirable or acceptable alternative?

The first part of the body of the paper, dealing with pertinent political points, some of which had been outside the terms of reference of the six Defence papers, opened with a consideration of why Australia had supported the Dutch. Apart from a conviction that the Dutch case was legally incontrovertible, the arguments for support were identified as the danger of having an unreliable (and potentially communist) Indonesia as occupying power, as opposed to the "safer" and "smoother" one of the Dutch. The Netherlands administration also served the interests of the inhabitants better. The policy flowing from these considerations, the submission went on, had nonetheless brought with it a number of disadvantages: it caused antagonism between Australia and a potentially menacing neighbour, and it agitated the Afro-Asian group. On top of this, "some" had argued that transfer to Indonesia would make a communist takeover in the archipelago less likely. Moreover, if the Dutch pulled out Australia "would have backed the losing side."

Focussing on the potentially negative aspects of the Dutch commitment, it was remarked voices in the Netherlands against Dutch policy had been heard since 1950, but these had not come from the mainstream. "Nevertheless", the paper argued, "there are clear indications that this mood of obstinate determination to hold on at all costs may be fading". There were now doubts as to whether WNG could be defended without aid, and the Dutch were asking for staff talks and a pledge of military assistance. This, it was implied, was a factor that had brought Australia to the crossroads:

If Australia is not able to give, either unilaterally or in consort with major allies, some assurance of military support, the Dutch may decide that they cannot accept the sole burden and throw their hand in. Can Australia accept the political, economic, and military consequences of giving such a commitment? Is it within our capacity to do so?

The impression given was that Australia had been – through circumstance – forced into a corner. There were great disadvantages to both Netherlands and Indonesian occupation, and now the Dutch might crumple anyway. Thus, it was thought "logical to look whether there is some acceptable alternative to either Dutch or Indonesian sovereignty". The DC it was noted, had shown an interest in a "neutralised" WNG, but the DEA, for its part, had not found an option that did not contain substantial risks. Still,
it could “not be said absolutely” that no alternative along the above-mentioned lines did not exist, and it was felt it could be valuable for Australia to secretly “plan ahead”.

Consistent with the popularity of a Papuan state in External Affairs, the importance of the indigenous population was emphasized at this juncture. It was the people of New Guinea, the submission claimed, and not the legality of the Netherlands position, that would appeal to the delegations of the UN. Self-determination, however, would take an estimated 40 to 50 years to complete, and the world would not wait this long before deciding the territory’s status. Consequently, it was believed Australia’s “best hope is that the Netherlands can build up over the next few years a significant body of opinion in Netherlands New Guinea which can and will assert its wish not to be incorporated in Indonesia.” This was deemed an important and valid consideration regardless of whether Australia chose to back a continued Dutch presence or an alternative to Indonesian rule.

The second main section of the paper reproduced the findings of the six Defence papers prepared from June onward. No attempt was made by Defence at this point to coalesce the findings into a series of basic observations. Rather, the observations of External Affairs were afterward combined with the military ones to form a series of general conclusions, followed by recommendations. It was said the Dutch presence might allow a movement to self-determination that “encourages future association with the people of Australian New Guinea rather than with Asia”. This, and the legal right of the Dutch to sovereignty, “lead Australia to support the Dutch”. In contrast, and secondly, it was remarked that self-determination was a long-term goal, “whereas Indonesian capability is likely to increase substantially in the next few years.” Additionally, maintenance of support for the Dutch would obstruct friendly relations with the Republic, and a hostile Indonesia could threaten Australia and prevent Australian forces from contributing elsewhere. In terms of The Hague, the Dutch Government could unilaterally withdraw from WNG. The idea of neutralization, though not dismissed earlier, was basically ruled out with the judgement that the UN and Indonesia would not accept it, and the dispute would continue.

The resulting proposals were fundamentally geared to enabling WNG to face east, rather than west, via a diplomatic path that contained less risk – and that accounted for the perceived importance of Indonesia as implicit in Cabinet’s policy of balance – than one based on Australian and Dutch armed force. Australian policy, it was argued, should “for the present be directed to keeping the Dutch in New Guinea.” With this in view, vigorous cooperation was to be encouraged between the administrations on the
island, whilst Canberra should try to “make Indonesia of the opinion that...an attack on Netherlands New Guinea would be unsuccessful”; the building of an international atmosphere opposed to force would be the primary means by which this would be done. In regard to the US, it was to be told frankly how Australia viewed the strategic situation, with the goal of establishing agreed courses of action. The level of military commitment to the Dutch would match that given by the Americans. Specifically, Australia should not give any guarantee concerning military combat assistance if the US was unwilling, and the Dutch were not to be informed of this condition. The possibility of military aid short of this could be studied, but no decision would be conveyed until after wider talks with Washington. This principle should also apply to staff talks. Contrarily, New Zealand and the UK would be informed and consulted. On the long-term front – and this was given no great place in the recommendations – it was suggested the DEA, with the DT, look secretly at alternatives such as trusteeship, particularly if the Dutch appeared likely to capitulate.

Cabinet discussed the submission at length. Before a general conversation, Casey and McBride reiterated points “to which they attached particular importance.” Case said the memorandum had come before Cabinet for two main reasons: firstly, “Indonesia’s capacity and intentions” had changed and, secondly, he needed instructions for upcoming talks with Luns, Selwyn Lloyd, and Dulles. He then emphasized his opinion that “Australia’s policy should be to use all possible methods of deterring the Indonesians from beginning any military venture”. “It was true” that a Dutch-Australian force could repulse an Indonesian lodgement “after a short interval”, but international political factors meant that there “was quite a chance...that the matter would not be fully tested militarily.” (Privately, Casey also believed, as he made Plimsoll aware, that it “is impossible to contemplate our using force in support of the Dutch”, ostensibly because this “would put us completely in the wrong with...South and South East Asia – and would destroy, at one blow, everything that we have been trying to do for the last ten years”). Looking further ahead, he said trusteeship contained numerous difficulties, and argued that any consideration of it be kept from the Dutch, and even the Americans.

Picking up on the question of deterrence, and showing that his thinking had changed little since 9 July, Menzies thought the US might be convinced to sign a joint declaration to the effect that an attack by Indonesia would be viewed as an act of

51 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 12 August 1958, in A4910/XM1, Vol. 7, NAA.
52 Emphasis original. See attachment to Casey to Plimsoll, 6 August 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 30, NAA. This is an important document showing that the Minister, at this stage, was in solid agreement with the thrust of the DEA section of the submission.
aggression. This, against the backdrop of traditional American caution over NG, was a rather hopeful suggestion, though the Prime Minister did admit “it would not be easy.” He then proceeded to broach an even more problematic idea. He supposed it might be possible to “arraign Indonesia before the Security Council on the ground that her provocative actions or statements were threatening the peace.” This, he thought, might force Indonesia to issue such a vehement denial as to make an attack diplomatically difficult for a long period, or a lukewarm Indonesian reaction might pave the way for a UN action such as the dispatch of Observer Corps. Russia would veto this, but “the exercise would not be valueless.” Menzies interest in deterrence, which was one of the central recommendations in the submission, was consistent with the approach taken regarding the Dutch in the previous 10 weeks, and it hinted at the nature of the decisions to be made by Cabinet on the next day.

McBride, taking his turn, drew attention to the strategic significance of WNG. He said Defence thought of ENG as important, and DNG therefore “very little lower.” However, there were two unfortunate circumstances facing Australia at this time. On one hand, Australia was limited, in practical terms, in how much help it could give the Dutch and, on the other, Indonesia’s military strength was “growing”. He implied this would not be a problem in the short-run, if enough cooperative planning was done, and if political problems did not intrude. He made no comments on the long-term, but the Ministers were well aware that the increase of military muscle mentioned was not likely to cease in the near future.

General debate between the Ministers revealed some conflict. The most glaring divergence was over the strategic importance of Indonesia as opposed to WNG. In what would have been earlier viewed as ‘heresy’, some Ministers said:

the real question for Australia was whether Indonesia was hostile or friendly. A hostile Indonesia without West New Guinea could be equally as dangerous to Australia as a hostile Indonesia which included West New Guinea and, while the question of West New Guinea remained unresolved, this fact tended to make Indonesia hostile.

Others, speaking later in the talk, commented that the idea of backing the Dutch only to the extent rendered by the US was “too negative”. Rather, they held that

the proper course should be to tell the United States that Australia would be fully obliged to support the Dutch in the face of an Indonesian attack and to seek American assistance in this eventuality....this was a matter of fundamental principle and...Australia should be ready to stand, and, if necessary, fight against an aggressor and this all the more so when Australia’s own vital interests were involved.
This dissension is perhaps a partial explanation for the middle-of-the-road path taken earlier by Cabinet – that is, the determination to look after interests in both Indonesia and WNG, despite the increasing difficulty of doing so. More significantly, however, it appears that key figures in Cabinet were convinced that the central points of both sides were valid and pertinent. In a continuation of conversation the next day, the Prime Minister brought his weight to bear in favour of the cautious juggling act already in place. Beginning a summary of “discussion and the issues”, he said ENG was “vital”, and the loss of WNG would make its defence, and that of Australia, more difficult. Against this, there was a “strong possibility” of the Dutch leaving, and one of the reasons they had remained thus far “has been the strong moral support of Australia.” Now the Dutch were asking for a promise to fight. This, Menzies thought, meant that if a “blunt answer” of ‘no’ were given, “we can expect the Dutch to leave sooner rather than later”. Additionally, respect for Australia in SEA would fall, and “public opinion in Australia would be seriously troubled.” It followed that such a blunt answer should currently be avoided. Similarly, a military commitment – which would have “undesirable political consequences...at the present time” (and here he was thinking primarily of repercussions on the US fight against communism in Indonesia, and on US-Australian relations) – could not be given for now. The other reasons, not mentioned by Menzies in this context, but raised by the Ministers earlier in the conversation, were that Australia could give only “limited” assistance to the Dutch, and that Indonesia appeared capable of gaining “a lodgement[, which] might satisfy the immediate political objectives of President Sukarno”.

At heart then, Australian policy was maintained, rather than altered. Australia still supported Dutch sovereignty, and did not want the Indonesians in WNG. There remained too many factors in favour of this to think of abandoning traditional policy. Nevertheless, the price Australia was able and willing to pay for the maintenance of the status quo had greater limits than hitherto thought. Not surprisingly, re-commitment to the duality of WNG policy consolidated tactical elements that had already been employed. Certainly, the only way to sustain long-established policy, keeping in mind a lesser preparedness to make sacrifices and a more risky environment, was to further develop the tactic of bluff. Endorsing a suggestion in the submission, Menzies thought the US needed to be convinced to become actively involved in deterring Indonesia from making an attack. This was something Casey should raise with Dulles. He would appeal on the familiar basis of the expectation that the US realized the strategic centrality of

53 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 13 August 1958, in A4910/XM1, Vol. 7, NAA.
WNG to Australian defence. In The Hague, Casey had to keep the Dutch guessing; they should be told not to push Australia “too hard”, and that the US had to become “better aware” and “more active”. Nonetheless, they should be given the “impression” that a future commitment by Australia was “not impossible”. Menzies thought Dutch attention should also be diverted to deterrence, and that they ought to be told an exchange of intelligence on a broad level was possible (though staff talks were presently not practicable).

Predictably, Cabinet endorsed Menzies’ proposals. In doing so, it exhibited a conviction that the old policy could be melded with new needs and realities. Effort, ingenuity, and an eye to improvisation might be required, but the middle road was not necessarily utopian. This perspective remained at the heart of Australian policy over the next few months.

VII

In general, further interaction with the Dutch, and the Cabinet decisions of August, merely reaffirmed perceptions that Australia’s status as an ‘imperial’ power had taken a series of blows. Fear of Indonesia, and subsequently greater dependence on the US, was again shown in a context (WNG) that had previously testified to the sum (Australia as the offshore power) of opposite characteristics (fearlessness and independence) – and the process was again revealed as incomplete; the Australian Government was not intimidated or subordinate to the extent that it forewent a policy that the Indonesians hated and the US thought a nuisance.

Keeping this in mind, greater fear of Indonesia than before, and an accelerated loss of independence over WNG, was evident – as had been the case in the May to July period. In refusing to provide a military guarantee, the need to take account of “political” considerations had now been added to restrictions imposed by military weakness. In saying that Australia “did not wish to part company” with, or “create problems” for, the US over a pact, Menzies was showing that the struggle against Indonesian communism was now viewed so gravely that the need for US-Australian cooperation had to be allowed to limit buffer policy. In short then, the perceived need for dependence had grown, and this was because apprehension over the communist menace had, by inference, also increased. In a wider sense, this axiomatically meant confidence in the concept of Australia as a middle power had again slipped, if incrementally.

54 Its only addition was to order that no studies of trusteeship be made, even at a secret level.
55 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 13 August 1958, in A4910/XM1, Vol. 7, NAA.
The Australian Government began immediately to try to consolidate its policy of balance. Some preliminary moves were made in Canberra but, as foreshadowed in the Cabinet meeting, the initial thrust was to be made by Casey in his trip abroad. The first leg of this, which took him to Britain and the Netherlands, was more successful than might have been expected, and seemed to confirm, provisionally at least, that the new policy had a future. The second leg in the US was quite different. Casey and his companions were not able to extract from the Americans what they might have hoped but, more importantly, they were brought under the influence of US policy towards Indonesia to the extent that they paid little attention to this failure. Indeed, during Casey’s tour of duty in the States, Australian policy began to shift gradually – in relative terms – away from planned equal concentration on WNG and Indonesia to one focussed more on the latter. In spite of this, attempts to juggle the two were furiously continued until the period between December 1958 and January 1959, when pressures were viewed as too great. At this point, and in the most dramatic policy judgement since 1950, WNG was officially deemed less significant than Indonesia.

Persevering with its series of safe token gestures to the Dutch, on 15 August the Menzies Government informed Lovink by letter that Australian authorities were willing to transmit a JIC study on the threat to WNG. This move represented a bare minimum of what might have been expected to give the Dutch some satisfaction. The note said that the JIC paper “cannot be taken to imply any subsequent commitment to...staff talks”, whilst Tange confidentially informed McClure-Smith that “We are trying to avoid being committed to a continual exchange of intelligence”. Added to this, the assessment was to be handed to the Netherlands services attache, “in order to avoid creating [the] impression [that the] document has formal status as [an] expression of [the] Australian Government’s views”.

This opening sortie was obviously a ‘softener’ in preparation for Casey’s arrival at The Hague. Still, within a week the Australians were reminded that they were far from able to conduct policy in a vacuum. A message was received without warning that that the British were re-thinking their willingness to abide by an earlier Australian

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1 The letter is contained in cablegram 152 from Tange to McClure-Smith, 15 August 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA.
request not to sell Gannet aircraft to the Indonesians. Even worse, they were now considering the sale of other heavy equipment, and they wanted Australia’s opinion. Cabinet was briefed, and Menzies hastily sent off an unhappy note to Selwyn Lloyd, arguing that such weapons might be globally insignificant, but that this was not necessarily the case regarding WNG. On top of this, he said his Government would be accused of helping the Indonesians if it agreed to the sale of such arms. Claiming that “of all external affairs concerning Australia this one is the nearest and most explosive”, he added that if an attack occurred it would be essential for him to be able to say the Government had done nothing to aid or condone the “aggressive arming” of Indonesia. If he could not, “a political upheaval would occur in Australia.”

A little earlier, news arrived that the Indonesians had agreed to a $7 million military assistance package from the US. This was allied to significant non-military aid, and represented confirmation of the American decision in late May to turn away from the rebels, and begin supporting elements in the Indonesian army and central government. The Australians had in fact known before the Cabinet meetings of 12 and 13 August that a deal on military equipment was in the pipeline, but they were nonetheless disconcerted by its conclusion. Ambassador Jones had told Djuanda at the time that the “US regards assurances [by Indonesia] to mean…that equipment, materials and services will not be used to obtain control of West New Guinea by military forces,” but, as Tange explained to Beale, Australia felt that “little reassurance is afforded by developments to date”. Pledges of non-violence had not been received from Sukarno, those from Nasution and Djuanda had been ambiguous, and the exchange of notes defining the purpose of the arms transaction were deemed of possibly limited value. Beale was asked to tell the Americans that arms had to “rigidly exclude” those likely to increase capacities vis-à-vis WNG, and that the US should tell Sukarno, Nasution, and Djuanda that there must be no resort to force. These requests were aligned with the general drive to create an atmosphere of deterrence, but it is also possible to detect a feeling that the arms race centred on Jakarta was developing to frightening proportions. It is also probable that, within a fortnight of cementing a tightrope policy, a number of

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2 See minutes of Cabinet meeting, 20 August 1958, and attached cablegram from Menzies to Selwyn Lloyd (British Foreign Secretary), in A4910/XM1, Vol. 7, NAA.
3 See cablegram 1513 from Washington, 14 August 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 30, NAA.
4 See Kahin & Kahin, op.cit., p. 192.
5 See cablegram 1389 from Washington, 4 August 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 30, NAA.
7 Cablegram 1298 from Tange to Beale, 20 August 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 30, NAA.
officials in Canberra were beginning to wonder how well this was adapted to emerging conditions.

Nevertheless, the evidence necessitating a further change was obviously deemed insufficient at this stage. Menzies and Casey charged enthusiastically along the chosen path. In preparation for the latter's talks with the Americans, the Prime Minister spoke to US Ambassador William Sebald in late August. Developing, as he had with Lloyd, the idea of a domestic “dilemma” presented by the arms deal, Menzies said earlier news of arms sales had been received well in Australia. On the other hand, recent information that landing craft, helicopters, and an anti-submarine vessel were to go to Indonesia meant that “criticism would probably rise very sharply.” The Australian Government might then be left with a problem; there would be calls for a pact with the Dutch – and it could be said with “great force” that the Netherlands would abandon WNG without a commitment, the result of which would be Indonesian control of WNG and a shaky ENG – and there would be “the usual uproar by... pacifist elements”, supported by many who also claimed WNG was vital. “Worse than this,” Menzies went on, “we felt that if we entered into such an obligation, that act might incur the hostility of the United States, with serious consequences.”

Menzies’ use of the international situation to paint a gloomy picture of the domestic scene, which he in turn depicted as having potentially disastrous effects on the Australian-American relationship, was both cunning and convincing – and it cleared the way for his punch line:

our proposals were, in substance, two. The first was that particular care should be taken not to build up, or even appear to build up, the aggressive capacity of Indonesia. The other was that the United States should use its own influence and the procedures of the United Nations to deter the Indonesians from aggression.

Concluding – and no doubt for dramatic effect – Menzies subtly suggested that having confronted the above dilemma, Australia would be forced to choose the road most feared by authorities in Washington:

To sum it all up, I said that it would be an outstanding calamity if Australia felt compelled into a course unfavourably regarded by the United States; that, in the event of a seriously apprehended threat of attack, an almost irresistible Australia public opinion might require that we support the Dutch; and that, under these circumstances, every effort must be made to prevent any such threat from arising. In this we felt that the United States could play a most powerful part, particularly if she remembered that, just as Formosa was regarded by her a vital to her security, so is New Guinea regarded by us. Indeed, I added, rather more so since it is much closer to our shores.

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8 See Menzies' account of the conversation, 27 August 1958, in cablegram 1917 from McBride to Casey and Harrison, 27 August 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 31, NAA.
Sebald was impressed by Menzies' entreaties. In a telegram to Dulles, he said the PM had spoken with “considerable earnestness” on the domestic difficulties that could face his Government, and spoke of Cabinet being “greatly exercised over [the] Indonesian situation and reports [that the] United States [is] apparently unduly strengthening [the] Indonesia [sic] military.”

II

Two days later, Casey had his crucial rendezvous with Luns. The Dutch Foreign Minister dominated the first half of the initial talk. He implied that the Netherlands Government was still fully committed to WNG, but pointed to the importance of showing the Dutch public that it was “thinking ahead.” Here he emphasized the significance of the cooperative relationship in New Guinea. He indicated a desire to establish a framework linking indigenous representatives from east and west, which would “help give the impression that the populations of the two territories were facing towards each other instead of outwards.” Luns was obviously looking to eventual union as a means of extracting the Dutch Government from the dispute without conceding to the Indonesians. He also hinted that the Dutch wanted to place greater responsibility in Australia’s hands before the completion of self-determination, saying “the Netherlands had no scruples about sharing some of the attributes of sovereignty with Australia.” In terms of the military problem, and perhaps having sensed the unprofitability of pushing the Menzies Government too far, Luns was careful to be less aggressive than in the past. He said he “understood” that Australia could not currently “give to the outside world any guarantee”, adding – and this would have pleased Casey – that he believed the Minister “agreed that it was extremely important to give the Indonesians the impression that they would not be allowed to get away with an attack.” He did, nonetheless, indicate that the Netherlands would not be satisfied with symbolic gestures, saying it “would be difficult for the Dutch people to see themselves fighting a Far Eastern war alone, or to see all Dutch forces sent to the Far East.” In other words, as far as the Dutch were concerned, the question of physical support was still live. At the conclusion of the talk, Luns claimed that “if after...two years we are still alone we are finished”, and that

10 See record of conversation between Casey, McClure-Smith, Luns, van de Beugel (State Secretary, Netherlands Ministry for Foreign Affairs, initials unidentified), and N. S. Blom (Dutch Government Commissioner for Indonesian Affairs), 29 August 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 31, NAA. Also present were Plimsoll, Baron van Tuyll (Secretary-General, Netherlands Ministry for Foreign Affairs), and J. Rookmaker (Director, far Eastern Division, Netherlands Ministry for Foreign Affairs).
“Even token Australian troops would help and I am sure the United States would not oppose such a move from Australia”.11

This was not a path down which Casey was keen to walk. Rather, he had to ensure that deterrence dominated. Perhaps trying to convince Luns that the Liberal Government was both realistic and genuine before moving to the central gambit of his mission, Casey admitted that Australia saw the situation as being more dangerous than it had been before the Indonesian civil war. He also mentioned that in his talks in London, Lloyd and Macmillan had agreed not to supply Gannets and other equipment to Indonesia. Indeed, the British Prime Minister had been persuaded that the US should be the only Western country providing arms to Indonesia. (This was seen as positive by the Dutch because it would allegedly mean the US was “irretrievably committed” to come to their side if WNG was attacked.)12 Perhaps with some trepidation, Casey then moved to the crux of the matter, announcing that “in Australia’s opinion, what we must concentrate on was creating deterrents.” Distancing Canberra from a material commitment, he said the “United States was in the best position to do this”; if fighting erupted, “it could quickly grow beyond anything Australia or the Dutch could control”. Luns remained placid in response, expressing “great pleasure” over the British reversal, and indicating agreement with the notion of having the US as the sole supplier of arms. He also shared Casey’s assertion that an attack by Indonesia was not imminent.13 His only negative observations were that he was not in favour of Casey’s suggestion that WNG be taken to the Security Council, feeling that this might give Indonesia an opportunity to press for negotiations, and nor did he think reference to the International Court was viable.14

Casey was delighted with this conversation, and others that followed on the same evening and next morning.15 Luns had not forced the “blunt answer” feared by Menzies, and Dutch ideas for the development of WNG seemed to blend nicely with the ideas floated in Australian circles of using the Papuan population to legitimize Australian political influence. In fact, (in a not unfamiliar manner) in the persuasive company of his Dutch hosts, Casey became more enamoured with clearly advanced

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11 See Casey’s account of the talk in cablegram 214 from Casey, 30 August 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 31, NAA.
12 See cablegram 211 from McClure-Smith, 28 August 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 31, NAA.
13 Conversation between Casey, McClure-Smith, Luns, van de Beugel, and Blom, 29 August 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 31, NAA.
14 Cablegram 214 from Casey, 30 August 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 31, NAA.
15 The additional talks, during which Casey spoke to Prime Minister Drees, appear to have covered the same ground. See Cablegram 2546 from Casey, 2 September 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 31, NAA.
Dutch schemes for Melanesia than was warranted by feeling in the Australian Cabinet. However, Menzies was apparently pleased with Casey’s effort, as reflected in remark by Allen Brown (Secretary, Australian Prime Minister’s Department) that Casey “seemed to have done quite well as he seemed to have left the Dutch in a friendly frame of mind but not to have committed himself on the subject of a military alliance[;]...there would not be any further pressure from the Dutch for some little time.” Casey himself, in spite of the problem of more heavy equipment being sent to theIndonesians by the US, must have travelled to Washington with great confidence.

III

His basic assignment, as set by Cabinet, was to persuade the US to be more active in trying to deter Indonesia from using force. In particular, Menzies had suggested in August that it might be possible to get the US to assent to a joint declaration – or a UN resolution – that an attack on WNG would be regarded as an act of aggression. There also seems to have been some hope that the Americans might be brought closer to providing military support in the event of an attack. In a strict sense, these wishes were to be disappointed. The Americans, with their eyes fixed on events in Indonesia, were not willing to come as far as the Australians might have hoped. But disappointment was tempered by two factors. Firstly, the US did exhibit an anxiety to come some way to meeting Dutch and Australian concerns because of its desire to maintain a close relationship with these countries and, secondly, the Australians were gradually brought to believe even more strongly in the necessity of forthright United States policy on Indonesia – a development that caused them to be less critical and demanding of the Americans.

Before Casey arrived in North America, Sebald delivered to Menzies an aide memoire ostensibly written in response to Menzies’ comments to the Ambassador on 27 August. From its contents, and the timing of its delivery, it seems this paper was intended to remind Australia of the objectives and tactics of American Indonesia policy,

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16 See paragraph 3 in loc.cit. Casey may also have been influenced by the presence of Plimsoll, who remained keen on independence for both sides of the island. The Minister’s press announcement upon arrival, and almost certainly drafted by Plimsoll, contained a strong statement of Australian support for Dutch sovereignty coupled with self-determination. See cablegram 2510 from London, 29 August 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 31, NAA.
17 See note for file by Allen Brown (Secretary, Australian Prime Minister’s Department), 2 September 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA.
18 See the final paragraph on p. 2 of the minutes of the Cabinet meeting of 13 August 1958, in A4910/XM1, vol. 7, NAA.
19 See text of paper in cablegram 1364 to Washington (repeated to Casey in London), 5 September 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 31, NAA.
and to encourage the Menzies Government to identify itself with such issues, as opposed to focussing on WNG and the relationship with the Dutch. The introduction, utilizing flattery and a sense of intimacy, claimed that American policy on Indonesia was well known to Menzies, was essentially in harmony with that of Australia, and therefore “needs no further deliniation.” Reference was then made to Luns’ “deep concern” over a possible attack, and it was rather disingenuously suggested that there were a number of points that could be made to him given an opportunity. It was doubtful that these did not contain a polite message for Australia. In a reminder of the central tenet of US Indonesia policy, it was said that the purpose of arms deliveries was to “strengthen the Army position”, because the “army represents the single most important obstacle to Communist takeover.” In terms of the exact specifications of these arms – and this was an answer to Menzies’ request that weapons not increase (or even appear to increase) the offensive capacities of Jakarta – it was said brusquely that “All military material has direct or indirect offensive potential”, but that “the programme is carefully designed to reduce this potential to a minimum without emasculating it to the point which would render it ridiculous.” The program, the details of which were briefly considered, was said to change “to no significant degree Indonesian potential”, and, at any rate, security rested “rather in the character and orientation of the Indonesian Government and the degree to which the United States and the West can exercise their influence against foolhardy military adventures”.20

Menzies’ other plea to Sebald was that the Americans use their influence and the mechanisms of the UN to deter Indonesia from an attempt on WNG. The above sentence might have been taken positively in this connection, but the US was apparently less enthusiastic than the Australians over blunt comment. “Indonesia”, it was stated, “understands clearly that the United States would oppose the use of force...using arms from any source”, whilst it was thought “repeated Western indications that we hold serious fears that such an attack is contemplated might well lead irresponsible elements to believe that Indonesia has in fact such a capability...and embolden them to dangerous sabre rattling.” Lastly, and amusingly using arguments that the Australians had put to the Dutch, it was claimed that there was no current evidence pointing to Indonesian plans to seize the territory by force, and that repeated assurances had been received from the Indonesians themselves.

20 Repeating a common argument, the aide memoire also said that if the West did not provide Indonesia with arms, the communist bloc would.
Menzies would have been encouraged by the implicit assurance that the “United States would oppose the use of force”, and that US authorities were still trying to do what they could to control the offensive capabilities of the Indonesian military. On the other hand, the idea that warnings to the Indonesians could enable “irresponsible elements” to influence Sukarno and Nasution was a little thin, and Menzies would not have been satisfied with US reluctance to keep before the Indonesians the folly of offensive action. At the same time, he would have noted the conspicuous real reason for this reluctance, and the central argument of the memorandum – the paramount importance of building and re-building relationships with Indonesia’s established leaders in order to defeat communism.

On 9 September Casey met with Dulles in Washington. This was a more unequivocally encouraging interaction, though much of what was said by the Secretary of State soon had to be discounted. Casey began by remarking that Australia was not worried about an attack within 6 months to a year, “but there was genuine anxiety...as to what might happen beyond that period.” What Australia needed was for the US “to exercise the most effective deterrent by placing conditions on any economic or military aid it might extend to the Indonesians.” Casey asked if the Americans could make the provision of further aid over the next 18 months dependent upon an agreement not to use force towards NNG. This could be privately declared, but publicity would be better. Dulles did not reply directly to this, yet he said that

any attack against West New Guinea would, of course, be disastrous and...we would throw our force against such an attack....we do not have Congressional authorization to do so but some way could be found if such developed....there were many things we could do, such as economic sanctions. If Congress were in session we could of course get authorization if necessary for the use of force.

The suggestion of material support in the event of an Indonesian offensive would have surprised Casey given his probable agreement with Menzies’ earlier observation that Australia could not, as Suez had shown, rely on the US in a crisis. To add to this, Dulles hinted that the Americans might do more on the diplomatic side, saying that “it might help...to have more explicit assurances” from the Indonesians if further talks on arms were held. Finally, and continuing along this conciliatory line, Dulles reacted to Casey’s comment (which was an attempt to impress and pressure) that Australia had refused Netherlands calls for a commitment by declaring that “he would not have objected had

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21 Conversation between Casey, Dulles, and Beale, in FRUS, Vol. XVII, ‘Indonesia’, 1958-60, pp. 270-81. For the Australian record, see cablegram 1773 from Washington, 9 September 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA.
the Australians given the Dutch such assurances." Casey must have walked from the State Department believing his success in Europe was set to be repeated across the Atlantic.

The reality, however, was that Dulles was not only ailing physically (and indeed to die towards the middle of 1959), but that during August he had devolved a good deal of responsibility for policy on Indonesia to Assistant Secretary Walter Robertson. Robertson, for his part, was sympathetic to the predilections of Ambassador Jones. The Australians were soon given a glimpse at this situation, and forced to treat Dulles’ statements with caution. Speaking to a member of the Australian Embassy, J. G. Mein (head of SW Pacific Affairs, State Department) noted Dulles “had not been briefed” on US attitudes to a Dutch-Australia pact, so his remarks in that regard “should...be treated with reserve.” Similarly, on the US attitude in the event of an attack, he said he “had been surprised that Dulles had said as much as he had”, and he did not support idea of placing conditions on arms deliveries, saying this was an expansion of the earlier Australian line, and that it involved “difficulties” – not to mention that it was “not likely to satisfy the Netherlands.” To cap off these chary observations, Robertson himself told Casey that the notion of prohibiting arms sales from other Western countries (and this had been one of Casey’s enthusiasms since speaking to Luns) was very unlikely to have support in the State Department.

This resistance to Casey’s intentions began to disturb officials in Canberra. In an instructive cable prior to an ANZUS Council meeting set for early October, Tange indicated there was a concern that Australia should be more careful not to get out of step with the US over Indonesia. This concern was not only that irritation of the Americans was generically damaging to the close relationship necessary for effective cooperation in Indonesia. The Australians genuinely believed in what the Americans were doing there – especially with recent signs that the Indonesian central government was responding favourably to Washington’s new approach – and the Australians had begun to accept that they had to pay more attention to Indonesian sensitivities if the ‘Reds’

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22 This information, and that in the previous sentence, is taken from Kahin & Kahin, op.cit., p. 192.
23 Cablegram 1797 from Washington, 12 September 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA.
24 Conversation between Robertson and Casey, 9 September 1958, in cablegram 1798 from Washington, 12 September 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA.
25 Tange to Casey, 30 September 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA.
26 On 22 September, Djuanda Kartawidjaja (Indonesian First Vice Prime Minister) had announced that national elections planned for mid-1959 would be postponed – a move that was widely interpreted as being disadvantageous to the PKI, because it was thought elections would show it to be the strongest party, and give it greater influence over the Government. See Kahin & Kahin, op.cit., pp. 194-95.
were to be stopped. In a section indicating both the relational and substantial anxieties of the Menzies Government, Tange wrote:

In general we expect that you may be under some pressure from the Americans to mend fences with Indonesians....the Americans may criticise our attitude as one which restricts the alternatives open to the Indonesians....We have to recognise the possibility of the Indonesians bridling against any suggestions of a Western combination controlling what they received to such an extent that the United States policy now being pursued in Djakarta is prejudiced. We may accordingly have to pick our path with some care. It seems important not to leave the impression that we will respond to all or any pressures the Dutch may being to bear.

The ANZUS Council meeting of 1 October demonstrated not only greater wariness on behalf of the Australians, but clear indications from the Americans that Indonesia was their priority, and that they were set to increase the intensity of their campaign against the Indonesian communists. Dulles, who had evidently been 'straightened out' by his officers in the interim, began by succinctly describing the reason for US unwillingness to be overly influenced by its allies concerning WNG: “We see the problem of West New Guinea within the context of the larger problem of Indonesia. The big stake in the area is Indonesia itself rather than the problem of West New Guinea.” He added that US policy in Indonesia had been successful to a fair degree in that the central government had now recognized the peril of communist growth, and was starting to take measures against it, but he felt more had to be done. “The policy that we [have] embarked upon here”, he said, “may require us to continue and possibly extend somewhat our military assistance.” Certain recommendations from the US Embassy in Jakarta were being considered, and he noted that these broached “some assistance to both the Air Force and the Navy and ...involve a category of goods which could be used for either aggressive or defensive purposes.” As he explained later, the arms program was necessary because “the nation which supplies military equipment does get a certain control over the country that receives it....And it is far better, we think, that Indonesia should be dependent upon us in that respect than dependent upon the Soviet Union or the Soviet bloc.” This basic justification was, of course, an argument the Australians knew well and agreed with, but it was the urgency of the American calls for an escalation of the Cold War in Indonesia, and its consequences for the arms issue, that was striking.

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27 Record of ANZUS Council meeting, 1 October 1958, in FRUS, vol. XVII, 1958-60, 'Indonesia', pp. 283-90. For the Australian account, see cablegram 1929 from Casey to Menzies and McBride, 3 October 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA.

28 Later, Dulles, affirming Robertson's earlier comments, said he did not think the US would agree to being the sole supplier of weapons to Indonesia.
The Americans knew these changes brought with them the potential for disturbing relations with the Dutch and Australians, so they were eager to add a sweetener. Referring to the questions of deterrence and US support, the Secretary said "we do not believe force ought to be used", and that he had told Luns the US would explore the possibility of enabling the Dutch to "make some statement of our views". Nevertheless, as Dulles' further comments showed, this would be governed by the administration's central aims in Indonesia. He described such a statement as "a delicate thing" because the US did not want to question Indonesian sincerity and "harm...our Indonesian relations". Thus, no promises could be given to the Dutch. Later in the conversation Casey asked whether the US could, forgetting the idea of tying it to an arms deal, get an assurance from Indonesia "in specific terms". Although Dulles justified rejection of this by saying he did not "attach a great deal of value to those statements", the Americans were again concerned that this might work to the detriment of attempts at US-Indonesian rapprochement.

On the topic of military reinforcement, Dulles again looked to give the Dutch and Australians some degree of satisfaction, but he could not disguise that this also was subject to limitations. Contrary to the favourable impression given three weeks before, Dulles said WNG did not fall into the same category as the China, Korea, or SEATO areas, whereby the President was able to endorse the use of force without reference to Congress. On the other hand, he went on, the US could hold out the probability of "logistical assistance", along with diplomatic opposition to Indonesian actions, and he tried to give the impression that more active assistance was not impossible, though a decision could only be made at the time.

The ongoing impact of the US attitude on Australia was shown in juxtaposition to the Dutch reaction. A few days after this meeting, the Dutch were given a statement for Luns to use as a summary of his sojourn in the United States. It read:

During the course of conversations with Secretary Dulles in Washington I expressed the deep concern of the Netherlands Government that Indonesia might use military force against Netherlands New Guinea. Mr. Dulles confirmed to me that the United States as its conduct has shown firmly adhered to the principle that force should not be used to effect territorial changes and that the United States considers that this policy is applicable equally to the Taiwan Straits issue and to comparable issues in other parts of the world, including Netherlands New Guinea. Mr. Dulles also emphasised that the United States had no reason to believe Indonesia contemplated resorting to force....In this connection he referred to statements which have been made by the Indonesian Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and other responsible officials.

29 Responding to a question by Casey, Dulles said that, personally, he would "not be reluctant" to back the Dutch in the Security Council following an attack by Indonesia.

30 See DEA copy of Luns' statement, 8 October 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 32, NAA. The first sentence is taken from teletype message from DEA to McBride, 9 October 1958, in the same file.
The Dutch were not entirely satisfied with this concession. Ambassador van Roijen, when handed the text for transmission to Luns, said "the statement clearly set forth [US] interest and concern with respect to the West New Guinea situation but...it was as if we were merely saying that we were against sin." Luns himself was reported to be "satisfied" with the statement, though Baron Van Tuyll (Secretary-General, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs) told an American representative in The Hague that it "would have been more beneficial had the press been given the statement by [the] Americans instead of by the Dutch."32

Australian perspectives were different, and becoming more so daily. Reflecting on the broad outcomes of his visit to the US, Casey was able to write with confidence of American attitudes toward Australian problems over WNG. This confidence not only originated in the conviction that the US was sympathetic to Australia's plight, but that its response was in substance satisfactory. On the arms issue, for instance, he said in a letter to McClure-Smith that "I believe the Americans are well aware of our concern about all these things, that they are by no means unconcerned themselves, and that, given the dilemma with which they are faced they have so far kept their own programme on a quantitative and qualitative basis which is reasonable".33 Likewise, in terms of discouraging an attack, he noted: "We, for our part, consider that the American views on the use of force are likely to have a real deterrent effect on the Indonesians". Manifesting the widespread nature of such satisfaction in Canberra with the American position, Plimsoll told Lovink:

from a military point of view, the Netherlands would have derived considerable assurance from what had happened in the last few months....Dulles had in effect assured Luns that, in the event of an Indonesian attack on Dutch New Guinea, the Americans would give the Dutch all possible support short of actual combat assistance, in respect of which Dulles could not pledge the United States without Congressional backing....on the whole the Netherlands should think they had got as far as they could expect the Americans to be able to go at this stage.34

The contentment of the Australians might have been thought to testify to the success of their 'balancing act' policy, but in fact it spoke more of the shift that had occurred in their own thinking. Their priorities, and therefore the criteria by which they judged accomplishment, had changed. Certainly, set against the original hopes and demands of the Government, Casey's tour of the US was not particularly reassuring. He had not
been able to gain promises to "rigidly exclude" potentially offensive weapons from the US arms program,35 and, in essence, the Americans would do virtually nothing to vigorously deter Indonesia from force for fear of jeopardizing their sensitive post civil war task in the archipelago. The help promised if an invasion did take place was also less significant than it might have seemed. The Australian Defence Committee's assessment had been that an attack could only be immediately repelled if it occurred within a fully operational allied framework, but logistic support – which was, incidentally, not guaranteed by the US – would be unlikely to prevent a situation in which the Republic could at least gain a foothold in WNG. United States opposition to Indonesia in the Security Council or the General Assembly, which Dulles had virtually promised, would not, in these circumstances, be able to halt momentum towards negotiations.

All this had failed to baulk the Australian Government because its concerns over Indonesia were, perhaps more unconsciously than consciously, growing faster than they were over WNG.36 In other words, prevailing thought in Canberra had begun to move in a direction that would undermine the policy of balance. This did not mean that the Australians had abandoned attempts to hold policy on WNG and Indonesia in tension. They continued to manoeuvre desperately to obtain objectives in both spheres, but they were to feel that they had decreasing room for movement as certain elements of the opposing pressures on the Australian Government increased substantially in the closing months of 1958. More precisely, heightened concern over Indonesia, which had been mainly rooted in the Republic's internal state, was added to by an apparent sudden downturn in Australian-Indonesian relations, and this was matched by an intensification of Dutch demands upon Australia.

IV

Canberra's relations with Jakarta had, of course, been particularly poor for some time, but by early October, the DEA were convinced they had worsened considerably. In a cable to Casey on the 9th, McBride wrote that the "general situation is that as a result of press speculation and deliberate Dutch policy[,] Australia has been projected into the position of being the main adversary of Indonesia in respect of New Guinea and its

35 The quotation is taken from Tange's instructive cable (1298) to Beale, in A838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 30, NAA.
36 Phelps, op.cit., p. 298 correctly discerns this trend, but his treatment of Australian policy in the critical 1957-58 lacks structure.
programme of building up its armed services.” McBride’s message showed that the Dutch had not only encouraged the idea that Australia and the Netherlands had concluded a “gentleman’s agreement” to act in concert if faced with an attack, but also that a provocative statement had been made by Drees saying that the two countries “had plans for development of the whole island, possibly as part of a federation.” The press, for their part, had contended that Casey may have been attempting to achieve a termination of arms sales to Indonesia.

McBride thought the time had come to “examine carefully the state of our relations with Indonesia and see what can be done to avoid further deterioration.” His prescription, showing how Australian policy had started to become skewed towards Indonesia, was that Australia resist Dutch pressure to a greater degree, while building greater understanding with the Republic; Australia’s “need”, he observed, was “some greater freedoms to avoid being pushed into policies which will breed real hostility in Indonesia.” Casey agreed with McBride. In reply, he said that “I too have been concerned at [the] increasing tendency for Australia and Indonesia to be regarded as being in opposite camps”, yet, in proceeding to further define Australia’s difficulties, he also reminded his colleague of the agreed direction of Government policy:

Our dilemma is that we are trying to ride two pretty difficult horses, namely to give sufficient encouragement to [the] Dutch to keep them in New Guinea and at [the] same time not to make [an] enemy of Indonesia. To put this another way, we want to keep West New Guinea out of Indonesian hands and at the same time play along with the American objective of providing Indonesia [sic] Army with internal security arms to enable them to control the Communists. I do not see any clear cut answer to this dilemma except to keep going in much the way as we are now. We are going to run into difficulties and embarrassments for a long while to come and probably have to do some zigzagging in the process.38

It was against the background of Netherlands and Indonesian agitation, and uncomfortable attempts to keep Australian policy on an even keel, that a Dutch-Australian conference on administrative cooperation was held in Canberra at the end of October. Ostensibly an outcome of the Netherlands-Australian joint statement of 1957,39

37 Cablegram 627 from McBride to Casey, 9 October 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 32, NAA. For Indonesian comment on the state of relations between the Republic and Australia, see cablegram 1948 from Washington, 3 October 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 32, NAA.
38 Cablegram 993 from Casey to McBride, 10 October 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 32, NAA.
39 See cablegram 711 from Tange to Walker, 27 October 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 32, NAA. The Dutch-Australian joint statement of 6 November 1957, released at the same time as the fight against a pro-Indonesian resolution in the UN, consisted of five points. The first was that the Dutch and Australian Governments based their policies on the “interests and inalienable rights” of the inhabitants of WNG, in conformity with UN ideals. The second made it clear that both sides of the island were “geographically and ethnographically related” and that the development of “their respective populations must benefit from cooperation in policy and administration.” The final points elaborated on this theme by stating the determination of both Governments to continue to work together on policy (in a manner which recognized ethnographical and geographical affinity in NG) and administration until the time of self-determination.
the Conference proved awkward for the Menzies Government. Given Cabinet’s
dominant concerns, the Australian delegation wanted to please the Dutch and encourage
developments that would allow the exclusion of WNG from Jakarta’s sphere of
influence, while concurrently avoiding being railroaded into a scheme that would
antagonize Indonesia (or the US). The Dutch, as indicated during Casey’s visit to The
Hague, were eager for more than this. It was, therefore, not a particularly edifying
event. In a memorandum for Casey afterward, Tange spoke of “Dutch complaints that
the Australian delegation...had proved unwilling to go as far as the Dutch had hoped”,
and lamented that “the Netherlands delegation looked primarily for a political decision
from the conference: the public announcement of a policy establishing a political
organism for the whole island”. Meanwhile, the Indonesians maintained a constant
level of excitement against Australia. Reporting on a press conference held by
Subandrio, Antara, the official Indonesian news agency, said that it was difficult for
Indonesia to “remain indifferent” to the conference, and implied that a military alliance
between the parties was in the offing. Expanding on this theme, Subandrio said that if
there were “provocative steps” by the other side “the possibility should not be
minimized of there being a conflict of arms.”

Such threatening behaviour was only one aspect of Indonesian policy in a period
in which Australia had been projected into the front line. Subandrio, as an adept
manipulator, and probably sensing Australian discomfort, also held out an olive branch.
In a conversation with Ambassador Jones on 22 October, he said he would hate to
witness a “gradual build-up of suspicion” between Indonesia and Australia, and “would
like to see [a] settlement of all outstanding problems, including the Netherlands New
Guinea dispute.” He was willing to “discuss [the] New Guinea question with Australia
on the basis of what was in the common interest of the whole area.” Holding out the
possibility of a future security arrangement between Australia and Indonesia, Subandrio
repeated his ideas to McIntyre a day later. He remarked that he “would like the
opportunity for frank and comprehensive talks with Mr. Casey and other Government

For a verbatim copy of the statement, see attachment to Cabinet Submission No. 922 by P. McBride (as
40 Tange to Casey, 28 October 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 32, NAA.
41 Cablegram 679 from Jakarta, 22 October 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 32, NAA.
42 There was also a storm over a text obtained by the Indonesians of an alleged military pact between
Australia and the Netherlands. See cablegram 2102 from Washington, 23 October 1958, in A1838/277,
3036/6/1, Pt 32, NAA.
43 loc. cit.
44 Cablegram 685 from McIntyre, 24 October 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 32, NAA.
leaders”, and “would not expect these to solve the New Guinea problem immediately but...they would help towards that end”.

The Australians felt bound to respond positively to Subandrio’s feelers, though they were to experience difficulties in trying to maintain symmetry between policy on Indonesia and WNG. On his return to Australia on 25 October, Casey, though making it clear his Government would “stand firm on its position that sovereignty...lay with the Dutch”, said Subandrio “would be very welcome and discussions with him could help clear up misunderstandings.” Frustratingly, the Dutch were not satisfied with this turn of events. They did not object to the general concept of talks but, fearing that the Indonesians would convey the impression that Australia and Indonesia would do a ‘deal’ on DNG, Lovink requested that it “be made clear in advance...that during Dr. Subandrio’s visit there would be no discussion whatever of Netherlands New Guinea.” Plimsoll replied that this could not be done, and Luns indicated soon afterward that this was accepted, but the Dutch remained anxious regarding Indonesian motives.

McClure-Smith also spoke of their “present nervousness about Australian intentions” as a result of the invitation to Subandrio and the Australian refusal to give a military guarantee. According to the Ambassador, there were “some disturbing, if faint, doubts as to whether Australian policy in respect of Netherlands New Guinea might be undergoing re-assessment.”

In an attempt to explain policy to McClure-Smith, whose sympathy for the Dutch was pronounced, Casey revealed that by late November, the Menzies Government, despite numerous discouragements, still felt it should persist with the chosen path. After directly quoting his comments to McBride on the dilemma facing the Government, he remarked:

I believe this still represents the situation...Our desire is still to see the Dutch remain in New Guinea and to give them all reasonable support to this end. There must naturally be a balancing out of national interests in this matter and what the Dutch think desirable we may not always be able to accept as possible....It is difficult to see in the longer term exactly how the New Guinea problem is going to be solved. All I can say is that we are continuously applying our minds to it and remain sincerely desirous of giving the Dutch all the help we can in dealing with it, within the limits set by Australia’s need to preserve other interests in South East Asia.

45 DEA press release, 25 October 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 32, NAA.
46 Conversation between Plimsoll and Lovink, 31 October 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 32, NAA.
47 Cablegram 285 from McClure-Smith to Casey, 1 November 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 33, NAA.
48 Cablegram 782 from W. D. Forsyth (Assistant Secretary, DEA) to Tange, 20 November 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 33, NAA. Later, in a letter to McClure-Smith’s chosen successor, Tange referred to the “extraordinary sensitivity” of the Dutch to Subandrio’s visit, which was, by December, planned for February 1959. Tange to Sir Edwin McCarthy (Australian Deputy High Commissioner to the UK), 2 December 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 33, NAA.
49 Despatch No. 12 from McClure-Smith, 4 November 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 33, NAA.
50 Casey to McClure-Smith, 26 November 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 33, NAA.
Over the next month this policy was subjected to increased pressure, and it cracked. There were a few particular issues that acted as a catalyst for this, but these must be understood against the background of previous months. More particularly, these issues stimulated a Cabinet review, which in turn brought together recent events, the gradual upsetting of the policy of balance, and the bias that had concurrently developed towards an ‘Indo-centric’ approach.

The first of these issues was a decision by the UK Government, contrary to Australia’s previously expressed wishes, to go ahead with the sale of Gannet aircraft to Indonesia. The British Cabinet concluded, furthermore, that it might be profitable to extend arms deliveries to Indonesia well beyond this. The minutes of a UK Cabinet meeting on 4 December read:

> It was suggested that the existing ban on the export of ships to Indonesia should also be reconsidered. No uniform policy was now being followed, even among the Western powers, in respect of the export of arms to Indonesia; and we should needlessly damage our economic interests by continuing to withhold supplies if the only result of our withholding them was that they were obtained elsewhere....The Cabinet....Invited the Foreign Secretary to arrange for the Strategic Exports...Committee to review the existing ban on the supply of ships to Indonesia.  

Menzies was informed of these developments on 7 December, and Cabinet was briefed three days later. In a reply to MacMillan endorsed by Cabinet, the Prime Minister said that Australia’s views had been set out in the cable of 20 August, but that as these had no doubt been considered in London, he would “simply take note that you have decided to proceed”. In other words, Australia was not happy with the choice made by the British, yet had to accept what was a fait accompli.

The British move was not a complete shock to the Australians — and in spite of the impression given to MacMillan in the earlier telegram, Menzies knew that the Gannets were useless in an offensive sense — but the significance of the sale was that it was probably interpreted by the Australians as part of a notable escalation of the Western supply of arms to Indonesia. Indeed, British plans were made known shortly after an announcement by Eisenhower that a further military package — this time to the tune of $14.9 million — had been arranged with the Indonesians. It was only obvious that these circumstances, combined with others, made for a situation that necessitated Cabinet consideration of the WNG question.

51 83 Conclusions, Cabinet meeting of 4 December 1958, in Cab 128, CC (58), PRO.
52 See minutes of Cabinet meeting, 10 December 1958, in A4943, vol. 1, NAA.
53 See Casey to McClure-Smith, 26 November 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 33, NAA.
One of these additional factors was raised in Menzies' letter to MacMillan; the Australians had come to believe an attack was possible in the immediate future. He wrote:

It will shortly be necessary for my own Government to give the closest possible consideration to the attitude we should adopt if there should be any aggressive movement by Indonesia...either by arms or by infiltration. Our information suggests strongly that there is a real danger of aggressive movement of one kind or another.

In mid-November, L. R. McIntyre (Australian Ambassador, Jakarta) had written that “certain recent reported moves...could be interpreted as indicating Indonesian intentions to use force if other means fail.”\(^{54}\) After mentioning a “secret report which our friends should have by now and which you should know about”, he commented on various rumours such as the Indonesian Navy requesting 600 tons of lubricating oil from Shell, and fervent efforts to obtain parachutes. McIntyre thought these developments could be part of the Indonesian “nerve war”, but nevertheless said Casey and Tange “should be aware of them.” Then, in late November or early December, the Dutch obtained a record of an alleged talk by Subandrio to Indonesian Heads of Missions in Europe, in which Subandrio claimed that “a new phase would be opened in the campaign to regain West New Guinea early next year and that D-Day was expected to be in March.”\(^{55}\) He continued:

Precise planning was now in progress and a crisis might be provoked either by the shooting down of a Dutch plane or seizure of a Dutch ship. Use would also be made of infiltration tactics to create a situation in New Guinea which would provide grounds for armed intervention.

According to the Dutch, who notified McClure-Smith soon afterward, this information coincided with intelligence from other sources.

The seemingly real possibility of an Indonesian invasion within a matter of weeks forced the Australian Government to look anew (as Menzies had indicated) at what Australia would do in such circumstances, and this unavoidably involved a review of policy in its entirety. This was to take account of movement towards greater interest in Indonesia, but before it happened, one further coercive factor was placed in Cabinet’s path. The Dutch, both genuinely concerned regarding an attack, and determined to force a clear-cut answer from Australia, sent Lovink to ask for supposed no-obligation consultations between the US, Australia, and the Netherlands “on ways and means of providing military assistance to Netherlands forces...within the timetable necessary if

\(^{54}\) Cablegram 716 from McIntyre to Casey and Tange, 17 November 1958, in A1838/1, 3036/6/1, Pt 33, NAA.

\(^{55}\) Cablegram 311 from McClure-Smith, 9 December 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA.
such assistance is to be effective.” He said that without discussions in advance, aid would not be possible. Lovink also left with Tange a 33-page report on the military threat to WNG, which, though apparently pre-dating Subandrio’s alleged comments, quoted a source saying that Indonesia would attack in the first quarter of 1959.

The Menzies Government was not the only Western power forced by the Dutch to find an immediate answer to the tense atmosphere surrounding WNG. Prior to Lovink’s demarche, the Australians heard that the Dutch had approached the British for a guarantee, and they received news on 24 December that van Roijen had asked the US for secret military talks. These were proposed to cover an evaluation of respective intelligence assessments of Indonesian intentions, and joint military planning. Knowledge in Canberra that the WNG-Indonesia issue was being intensely scrutinized by two close allies provided further incentive for the Menzies Government to look closely at its attitude to the same question.

VI

Faced with a rapidly changing situation on a number of fronts, Cabinet organized a meeting for 5 January 1959. At this, the “whole Indonesian question” would be considered, whilst, in a specific sense, the Netherlands desire for guarantees and advance consultation would be examined. Also to be looked at was cooperation between Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and America (and perhaps the Dutch) “in respect of political and diplomatic moves which may be taken in advance of an attack, and if an attack occurs”. In the event, two submissions – one by Defence, and the other by the DEA – were put before Cabinet. The first included a report by the JIC on the likelihood of an Indonesian attack in 1959, and also a revision by the Chiefs of Staff Committee (CSC) of a paper on the military measures that could be taken in such a situation. Apart from recognizing that Indonesia might be hindered by thoughts of possible international reaction, Dutch capacity, and the likelihood of success, the JIC paper contained little to cheer those hoping to hold to traditional Liberal policy. In noting general factors likely to contribute to violence on Indonesia’s part, it was said Sukarno’s power had increased, the moderates were losing influence, and the PKI’s

56 Conversation between Tange and Lovink, 22 December 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA.
57 See “The Indonesian Threat to Netherlands New Guinea”, 14 November 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA. The report was of the opinion that the Indonesians could successfully gain a lodgement in WNG.
58 Cablegram 3856 from London, 16 December 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA.
59 Cablegram 2503 from Washington, 24 December 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA.
60 Cablegram 1842 to Washington, 22 December 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA.
61 Submission No. 11, tabled 5 January 1959, in A5818/2, Vol. 1, NAA.
influence had grown further in the past few months. Additionally, Nasution had not moved against the “extremists” and might not resist pressure from them for an attack. Arms expansion was also unsurprisingly thought to heighten chances of aggression. As far as the Dutch were concerned, they were thought to be potentially weaker after elections following the fall of the Drees Government — and this too might embolden Jakarta. Recent elections in the US were likewise viewed in a negative light; with fewer Republicans in Congress, the administration might judge that it could not get approval for military action if Western interests were not directly on the line. In terms of current and specific intelligence, the JIC judged there to be no “hard” evidence pointing to an immediate attempt — indeed some of it was consistent rather with an effort to weaken Dutch resolve — but believed “it would be wise to accept as a serious possibility that the Indonesians are planning an attack on Netherlands New Guinea, possibly in March, on a small scale coupled with UN action.”

The CSC assessment on viable military measures was fundamentally the same as the report on this subject of mid-1958. That is, without a wider allied framework, the Dutch and the Australians would not be able to prevent a lodgement. The only notable supplement was the estimate that, if the Dutch left, Australia, having advance warning, would be able to move in, and might therefore discourage an attack. There would, nevertheless, be problems for the Australians if they did, and especially if an extended campaign developed. None of this encouraged the Australian Government to either fight alone or get involved in a conflict alongside the Dutch, especially as the Indonesians would probably combine military action with a move in the UN.

The DEA contribution, hastily prepared and less lucid than that of August, ran to a sizeable 38 pages, plus annexes. The introduction listed elements justifying a review of Australian policy as a whole. Indonesia, it was written, “has continued to acquire considerable quantities of armaments”, and its “domestic political situation may deteriorate further to the advantage of the Communists.” On top of this, the chance of an attack in the near future was real. (Later, it was also acknowledged that the Indonesians might be trying to create “an atmosphere of tension — without necessarily invading”, in order to convince the Dutch the costs were too great, and to make members of the UN more willing to vote for negotiations on sovereignty). Regarding the Netherlands, there was a real chance that it might withdraw from WNG. Like the JIC, External Affairs

52 For text of JIC conclusions, see also cablegram 1844 to Washington, 23 December 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA.
53 See Submission No. 11, tabled 5 January 1959, in A5818/2, Vol. 1, NAA.
thought the end of the Drees’ era – an era characterized by determination to hold NG – might have an impact. Furthermore, the Dutch had made it clear they would not fight alone.

The following opening passages, which quoted 1958 decisions on the importance of WNG and Indonesia, revealed concern over both Indonesia and the Netherlands, but especially the former. This was consistent with the gradual undermining of the policy of balance that had occurred since October. Indonesia was deemed to be “by no means lost”, though war over WNG would bring a “sharp and possibly even decisive increase in Communist influence”. In elucidating the significance of Indonesia to Australia itself, and to Australia’s position in Asia, it was also judged that policy “must have regard to Australian-Indonesia relations over the long term.” In dealing with Netherlands policy and the request for guarantees, it was simply remarked that it be assumed the Dutch would leave if they did not get more specific promises from the US, the UK, and Australia, and that Cabinet had to decide whether or not to go further. If the Dutch did withdraw, trusteeship negotiations, or anything commanding a two-thirds majority in the UN, was seen as more likely than outright transfer.

The American attitude was passed over with surprising brevity. Still, there were two points made that would have caught the attention of the Ministers. The first was agreement with the JIC’s assessment that US Congressional elections might be important. Dulles had promised logistic support, but elections left “considerable doubt whether, in a situation in which the direct defence of free world interests against Communism was not obviously involved, Mr. Dulles would be able to pursue such a policy effectively.” Another facet of this situation, the paper continued, was that the US might go along with a cease-fire resolution in the UN, which would favour Indonesia.

The latter part of the paper looked more explicitly at courses Australia could follow. A lack of clear policy recommendations is evident though, in contrast to changes that had evolved in Australian thinking, the general impression given was that no great changes should be made to policy. In countering Indonesia, for instance, intense and immediate diplomatic activity was deemed necessary if an attack was imminent. Otherwise, and also on a political level, the Dutch could propose to bring Indonesia into permanent consultation over WNG, a move which the Indonesians would probably reject, but it would show them to be more interested in territorial acquisition than in the welfare of the Papuans. Reference to the Security Council was, broadly speaking, not feasible because Australia had to accept Luns’ opposition to the idea. If
fighting began, the situation in the UN was foreseen as very difficult. This was thought to draw attention to the fact that Australia and others would have to react rapidly, before a UN cease-fire or military support from the Bloc or Afro-Asia.

Deterrence was assessed as being likely to work if enough warning of an attack came. Overt aid to the Dutch (either promised or given) was, on the other hand, portrayed as containing many risks, and it was proposed that Australia not go beyond what the British and the US were prepared to give. While consultations on the threat to WNG, which would include the Netherlands, were unavoidable, discussions should be held with the US and UK on the practical limits of support. In doing so, Australia had to bear in mind the dangers of great power conflict on its doorstep.

Long-term issues were given more air than in August. The Dutch might, it was observed, hold on as hoped until a political movement for self-determination emerged, but the likelihood of their withdrawal had increased over the previous year. Apart from supporting transfer, which was assumed to be presently impossible for the Menzies Government, Australia could push to be owners or sole trustees of WNG, but the first was a hopeless prospect, and the second improbable. Rather, an international trusteeship, including Australia, dominated by Indonesia, and charged with self-determination, was the most likely. If the Dutch pulled out, Australia had to be prepared for this contingency by having decided what sort of NG it wanted when self-determination was possible.

VII

The final section consisted of a series of questions for “early decision”. These revolved around problems pertinent to staff talks, a guarantee, a faked incident or attack, deterrence, and long-run issues. Cabinet’s answer to these, and other matters raised in the submission, was generally more decisive than that implied by the DEA. In essence, the Ministers decided that Australia could no longer attempt to have WNG and Indonesia as equally important priorities; the US-Australian fight against communism in Indonesia, to which Australia had begun to pay relatively more attention in recent times, had to be recognized as taking precedence over interests in WNG. The third point “noted” by Cabinet read:

The strategic importance of Indonesia is of greater significance to the United States and to Australia than Netherlands New Guinea and therefore it should be a major objective to keep Indonesia non-Communist and friendly.  

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64 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 5 January 1959, in A4943, Vol. 1, NAA.
Set against the history of Liberal policy, this was a most dramatic judgement. For most of the 1950s, the maintenance of WNG as a strategic zone was an axiom of Australian foreign policy; Indonesia’s only real significance was as a perennial, but third-rate, threat to the physical protection of that zone. To decide that Indonesia itself should become a central focus, and at the expense of WNG, was therefore truly radical. It was a massive conceptual leap for Australian Ministers to see Indonesia not as a nuisance on WNG, but as consideration more innately important than the imperative of buffer policy.

Fear of a communist controlled Indonesia was central to this change. Indeed, it was not a new view of Indonesia’s inherent potential that prompted the Australian Cabinet to alter its views on the Republic’s strategic significance. The danger of a communist equipped and controlled government in possession of Indonesia’s vast human and economic resources looked a far greater threat than a chaotic, neutralist post-colonial regime had with the same natural assets. Already, gravely disturbed by the situation in the Republic, Casey and his Cabinet colleagues were convinced, through further close contact with the Americans, that complete commitment would be needed to defeat what was a great threat.65

The particular reality that made communism in Indonesia immediately relevant to WNG, and a choice between the importance of the territory and Indonesia necessary, was that the Australians had come to believe too many elements central to an ideal WNG policy could damage the fight against communism. Here particular ‘lessons’ of Casey’s visit to the US, apart from the general one mentioned above, combined with the pressures since then to critical effect. For instance, Casey had realized as far back as May that refusal to arm Nasution, which would be best for WNG, might also curtail his ability to transform the Indonesian political scene. Afterward, the same point had been rammed home repeatedly by the Americans.66 Now, as the Western arms program accelerated, Australia had the option of trying to hinder further deliveries, but was also reminded of the harm this might do to the vital US plan.

A pact with the Dutch was another move that might have been advantageous in connection with WNG – McIntyre had already said Indonesian military plans might be influenced by how the Dutch and Australians were predicted to react – yet this too

65 Phelps, op.cit., p. 304, acknowledges the importance the Australians were attaching to the way in which WNG policy was being received in Indonesia, but appears to erroneously ascribe this to a simple desire to follow the American lead (see, for example, ibid., p. 302).

66 This was not necessarily explicit, but was always implicit in their defence of the arms program as vital.
could, it was thought, unsettle the Americans, and therefore upset their anti-communist Indonesia policy. This had been the implication of Menzies’ comment on 13 August that Australia “did not wish to part company” with the US over a guarantee, and his reservations would have been strengthened by US refusal during Casey’s visit to promise active support for the Dutch. He would also have noted that Mein had made of point of questioning Dulles’ assertion that he would not have minded a Dutch-Australian military agreement.

The Australians were also now worried that such an alliance, or any ‘overzealous’ manifestation of WNG policy, would disadvantage the Indonesian moderates in their struggle against the PKI. The communists would be able to discredit groups sympathetic to the West as unpatriotic in that they had aligned with a bloc that was preventing realization of a national claim. The Liberal Government was aware that this had been a popular idea in the State Department for many years, but now it had come to share the notion. This change started to become obvious in September as Casey experienced resistance to the idea of placing conditions on arms deliveries. Extreme Dutch pressure on the issue of a guarantee, culminating in Lovink’s most recent approach, compelled the Australian Government to reaffirm and refine the reasons why they had, and would, resist hard-line measures such as a military treaty.

Beyond the communism, and as foreshadowed in the Cabinet meetings and submissions of mid-1958, the problem of an attack on WNG was the other elemental pressure that caused the Australian Government to subordinate traditional WNG policy to Indonesia policy. Indeed, although the Ministers effectively rejected the JIC’s assessment by noting that the “U. S. A. and the U. K. had separately concluded that for both political and military reasons an attack...is unlikely within the next six months”, they also observed that the Australian military, either alone or with the Dutch, would probably not be able to succeed against Indonesia in circumstances likely to develop – a lodgement in WNG followed by action in the UN. This conviction, and the recognized reality that the “U. S. A. and the U. K. have declined to commit themselves in advance to military action”, can only have stimulated the idea that it would be better for Australia to give greater weight to relations with Indonesia before the fait accompli of an invasion compelled them to do so. In other words, Australia’s physical inability to

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67 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 13 August 1958, in A4910/XM1, Vol. 7, NAA.
68 See Tange to Casey, 30 September 1958, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 6, NAA. Fears over the effects of a restrictive arms policy, and a Dutch military agreement, seems to be reflected in cablegram 627 from McBride to Casey, 9 October 1958, in A1838/277, 3036/6/1, Pt 32, NAA.
defend an area always deemed strategically vital meant that the importance of the power likely to occupy that area in a crisis had to be reassessed in advance.\textsuperscript{69}

The strength of Australian concerns over a communist Indonesia at this time, and the fact that Australia was unable to militarily defend WNG, also made the chance of a Dutch withdrawal a live influence in favour of a policy centred on Indonesia. The possibility of the Netherlands leaving had, through most of 1958, been a ‘floating’ pressure – one capable of favouring or damaging orthodox Liberal policy. Hypothetically, the brittleness of Dutch resolve may have stimulated Australia to push a traditional line even more strongly if it had been materially capable and politically willing. By early 1959 the Menzies Government met neither of these criteria. Thus, the prospect of Dutch abandonment gave further reason for Cabinet to pay more attention to Indonesia, which would almost certainly be given at least partial control in any peacefully negotiated transition.

\textbf{VIII}

In spite of the obvious long-term importance of the decision to accord WNG less significance than Indonesia – and that it its antecedents had much to do with thoughts surrounding Australia’s future prospects – Cabinet was reluctant to issue edicts with anything more than immediate relevance. One of the reasons for this was that although WNG had been relegated in relation to Indonesia, it had not been deemed unimportant. As long as there was any doubt in the Ministers’ minds that the exclusion of WNG from Indonesia’s sphere of influence would certainly bring about war, irrevocable disturbance to bilateral relations with Indonesia, or contribute in a major way to the rise of communism in the Republic, they did not want to forfeit the possibility of establishing a permanently friendly WNG. Thus, the present aim of Cabinet was to allow the primary importance of Indonesia to influence policy, but not to the extent that the minimum prerequisites for a non-Asian NG were undermined. The ultimate implication of Cabinet’s landmark decision – which involved acceptance of transfer to Indonesia – would remain latent unless a crisis emerged over Indonesia.

This policy of ‘controlled bias’ was evident in Cabinet’s specific instructions. Active steps were to be taken to sustain the Netherlands Administration, and to prevent military penetration (“Australia should intensify diplomatic activity directed towards the

\textsuperscript{69} In setting Australia’s weakness alongside anxieties over communism as the dominant causes of the change in Australian policy, it must be remembered that the second was the preeminent influence – as was implied in Cabinet’s comment that “Military action against Indonesia would advance the interests of Communism in Indonesia.”
preservation of Dutch control...and deterring Indonesia from aggression”), but Australia would not fight for the Dutch (no commitment was to be given in the absence of one by the US and the UK, and this, the Australians knew, meant almost certainly that none would need to be given). Cabinet noted military action would benefit Indonesian communism, and “would have adverse effects upon our relations with Indonesia and other countries of the Afro-Asian group”, yet it evidently believed discreet diplomatic measures – if accompanied by steps demonstrating the eminent reasonability of Australia’s case70 – might not have these effects.71

IX

The new Australian attitude seemed to mark the virtual end, as far as the Government was concerned, of the country as the preeminent power south of Singapore. Aggressive defence of the strategic cushion had always been a badge of Australia’s status – this was thought to be the way any true imperialist power behaved – but now that a ‘friendly’ WNG was more a tenuous and conditional gamble than a dominant pursuit, it must be assumed that faith in the substance behind the symbol had been almost completely undermined.

The causes and features of the Government’s changed outlook on WNG of course suggest such an assumption is well founded; there were obvious links between these elements and the aspects previously inherent to Australia’s pretensions as a middle power. Firstly, the decisive and immediately discernible influence of unease over Indonesia on Cabinet’s groundbreaking decisions contrasts starkly with the aplomb that used to leave its mark on national self-perception. Apprehension concerning superpower conflict in the Indonesian islands, and over the arrival of the Republic’s forces as a real threat, was very different to the arrogance of past years. A feeling of dominance had been replaced by one of enervation. Secondly, indications of dependence on the US and UK prominent in January 1959, and inter-related with anxiety over Indonesia, were antithetical to the independence that formerly fed off confidence vis-à-vis Indonesia.

70 This idea was exemplified in the decision that Australia encourage others to see the advantage of a solution engineered by the International Court. The idea, with its legalistic tone, appears to have originated with Menzies, and was bound to mean little to the Indonesians.

71 The only Cabinet exercise at the meeting that unambiguously encompassed an extensive time frame was consideration of the problem of the “most acceptable” form of administration to replace an outgoing Dutch one. The impression given in the record is that the Ministers did not get far along this path. They merely “considered” a number of propositions put forward by Casey. It seems there was little real enthusiasm for this activity at the meeting, perhaps because it was thought the question needed much more careful thought; care had to be taken to square any detailed plan with the new complexities of Australian policy.
The Australians, for example, were now more unwilling than ever to annoy the US and UK over arms or a guarantee, when they had for years berated the Americans for policies that had had no active effect on the dispute.

Such contrasts with the past were partially visible during the period of a ‘juggling act’ policy, but they had been embryonic, and never brought together with the clarity and finality reflected in the minutes of 5 January – the battle for Indonesia was given definitive weight, US-UK and Asian-Indonesian opinion was given unprecedented attention, and military support for the Dutch was rejected (for the sake of this opinion and because of Australia’s impotence) with virtually certain knowledge that the Dutch would get no other backing. Overall, the Ministers revealed a view of Australia as the declining power of offshore SEA, perhaps able to cling to a portion of the old ‘empire’, but only due to the beneficence of outside forces, and as part of a general reorientation from the politics of influence to those of survival.
Chapter 7: New Priorities in Action: the Visit of Dr Subandrio to Australia, February 1959

I

The behaviour of the Australian Government during Subandrio’s visit – and in particular a joint statement in which Australia claimed it would not impede a solution negotiated freely between the Dutch and Indonesians – was controversial at the time, and has continued to be so since. Four days after the Casey-Subandrio announcement, for instance, an editorial in *The Age* suggested that

On careful examination, it must be said that there has been no change of policy. Australia has always accepted Dutch sovereignty over West New Guinea, and does so still.¹

At the opposite end of the spectrum, journalist Denis Warner wrote that the meaning of the statement was that “Indonesia will eventually get sovereignty over West New Guinea”.² More recently, Peter Edwards has implied that Subandrio’s tour was essentially for the purposes of strengthening Australian-Indonesian relations, and that no genuine changes took place in Australian policy.³ In contrast, Viviani has asserted that the *communiqué* was aimed at altering Australian policy, whilst leaving an escape route if public reaction was unfavourable.⁴ In the face of such widespread disagreement, the casual observer might be forgiven for assuming evidence was lacking for anything other than a speculative conclusion, but this is not the case. Rather, the key to understanding the problem may be found in the changes to Cabinet’s outlook which began in 1958, and reached a climax at the meeting of 5 January 1959.

The framework within which the Australian Cabinet had decided to work just prior to Subandrio’s visit was that Indonesia was more critical to the country’s defence than WNG, though the outlines of NNG policy would not be greatly changed unless interests in Indonesia were deemed threatened by that policy. The immediate objectives pertinent to this plan were to support deterrence and administrative cooperation with the Dutch, whilst at the same time leaving room for diplomatic moves that took account of Indonesia’s central importance. Attempts to reach more cordial relations with Indonesia were a necessary part of this policy, and that – as suggested by the fears of serious breakdown which prompted agreement over a visit – was the basic aim of the Australian Government as it approached Subandrio’s arrival.

¹ *The Age*, 19 February 1959.
⁴ Viviani, *op.cit.* p. 194.
One of the evident problems for the Australians was that aspects of the tactical game designed to protect WNG still had the ability to militate against those geared to furthering interests in Indonesia, and vice versa. This was something that had to be managed during Subandrio’s visit (and beyond) if Canberra was not to choose the easier option of abandoning WNG, and configuring policy to what was already the priority—Indonesia. An important letter from Casey to Menzies aptly illustrated the delicacy of the task facing Australia:

we have two interests— that of doing everything possible to deter Indonesia from resorting to force (although the possible deterrents are not potentially very powerful) – to do what we can to keep the Dutch in West New Guinea – but in the whole of this process, I believe that we must not appear to threaten Indonesia with force, nor do anything else to create an antagonistic Indonesia for the future. At the same time, during Subandrio’s visit, we have to be careful to avoid giving him the impression that we are getting ready to abandon the Dutch. Similarly we have to let the Dutch know that in our talks with Subandrio we are maintaining our line that sovereignty belongs to the Netherlands.5

Four days before Subandrio’s arrival, moves were made to remind Cabinet of issues involved with the visit, and to establish more specifically what line would be taken with him. Casey put a submission before Cabinet, and it began with a section entitled the “Importance of the visit to Australian-Indonesian relations”.5 This made clear to the Ministers the general purpose of the visit, and the difficulty of simultaneously attending to the bare necessities of a continued Dutch presence:

His visit will be regarded by the Indonesians as of major political importance in view of recent developments inside Indonesia and because of the Dutch New Guinea dispute. We should aim to treat Dr. Subandrio during his visit in a way that will have the effect of lessening, or of appearing to lessen, the tension between Indonesia and Australia which results from our support of the Dutch in New Guinea....At the same time, it is important that Dr. Subandrio should not appear to succeed in any efforts he may make to drive a wedge between ourselves and the Dutch. It will not be an easy task: to help our relations with Indonesia we do not want him to return home with his mission appearing publicly to have been a failure: but on the big question – New Guinea – he must not appear to have won a victory.

Casey gave further space to sketching particular arguments that might be raised by Subandrio regarding WNG, and to what might be said in reply. This was fairly standard material in terms of what had been said between Australia and Indonesia, and at the UN, over previous years, though from the Australian point of view, it was now to be couched in softer language. Casey’s precise recommendations were that “Dr. Subandrio should be given no encouragement that our attitude is likely to change”, and that “we should be prepared to issue a statement if necessary at any time to correct any false impression on

5 Casey to Menzies, 15 January 1959, in M2576/1, 39, NAA. The Dutch were duly assured on 5 February that there would be no negotiations with Subandrio in connection with sovereignty over WNG. See conversation between Lovink, Casey and Plimsoll, 5 February 1959, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 34, NAA.
6 Submission No. 30, dated 30 January 1959, in A5818/2, Vol. 1, NAA.
our attitude which the Indonesians may seek to propagate”. Finally, he proposed that Australia’s broad approach should be instructed by the considerations laid out in the submission.

Cabinet “generally endorsed” the line to be taken with Subandrio as outlined in the agendum, adding that “it would be desirable from the Australian point of view to limit the discussion as nearly as possible to action by each side to put on record its views and arguments about Dutch New Guinea.” There were, however, signs that the Ministers wanted to leave open the possibility of showing a slightly less severe face on NG than envisaged in the memorandum; it was remarked that “the extent and nature of the discussion on Dutch New Guinea would depend partly on Dr. Subandrio’s tactics.” This was to be an omen. Clearly exercised about the state of the bilateral connection, Cabinet later asserted that “Australia should be willing to consider and, as far as possible, to meet any proposals by Dr. Subandrio for assistance to Indonesia or the improvement of Australian/Indonesian relations”, and although it was noted parenthetically that this “was, of course, outside the Dutch New Guinea question”, it could not be denied that WNG was the principal obstruction to better relations. There was, therefore, a strong temptation to introduce a slightly more conciliatory note into “the extent and nature” of conversation on DNG.

In response to a request by Cabinet to Menzies and Casey to prepare a brief for the discussions, Casey put forward another memorandum on the 9th. In again examining issues that might be mentioned by Subandrio, and Australian rejoinders, this paper repeated the call both to present orthodox views on WNG and to stimulate greater intimacy with Indonesia. Nevertheless, and significantly, it developed the idea of giving a small concession to Subandrio on WNG. In this context, the final two paragraphs in the section addressing primarily contentious subjects proved to be the most important. In the first, the Minister thought that

In putting the Australian case to Subandrio we should concentrate on the arguments about self-determination and on the legal aspects. At some stage, however, I expect that Subandrio will begin to seek some modification of the Australian attitude. I do not think that he expects Australia will abandon sympathy with the Dutch position. In fact he may well say this. But he is likely to insist that all he has looked for is some reason to hope that Australia will adopt a more passive role in the dispute instead of fortifying the Dutch resolve to stay.

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7 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 5 February 1959, in A4943, Vol. 1, NAA.
8 The Ministers were eager in discussions with Subandrio to spend time (as had been suggested in the submission) on a series of topics apart from WNG, and intended to promote bilateral harmony and cooperation.
9 loc. cit.
10 Submission No. 39 by Casey, 9 February 1959, in A5818/2, Vol. 1, NAA.
11 These included “controversial themes”, and “matters on which discussions on cooperation should be possible.”
Revealing awareness of the pivotal place of WNG in the bilateral relationship, Casey's second paragraph began: "I believe our attitude on such a proposition by Subandrio — and the way in which our attitude is interpreted and received in Indonesia — could be crucial to the success or failure of this visit and even perhaps to the future of Indonesian-Australian relations." Casey felt that the best way to answer would be to again emphasize that Australia regarded Netherlands sovereignty as well-founded in terms of the law, and that the Commonwealth backed publicly articulated Dutch intentions to develop WNG to the point of self-determination. Still, Casey added, Subandrio could be told that if the Dutch altered their stand vis-à-vis sovereignty, "this would present a new situation of which we would necessarily have to take account." In other words, if the bedrock of current Australian policy on WNG — that of support for Dutch sovereignty — were undermined by a Netherlands decision, Australia would reconsider its position.

Casey's intention in advancing this line — and he probably had clearance from Menzies in doing so — was not to employ the emergency alternative of acceding to the 'loss' of WNG as a means of addressing a dire situation in Indonesia. Instead, it was probably conceived as a clever pseudo-concession to Indonesia on Irian (the heart of Australian-Indonesian tensions) that would not damage the Dutch, and that contained the hidden bonus of being useful if Australia did have to liquidate traditional WNG policy at a later date. In other words, it was viewed as a step that in one clean movement accounted for the needs of a Dutch WNG, for the essentiality of concurrent recognition of Indonesia's centrality, and for the option of leaving the territory to the Republic.

II

After landing in Sydney on 9 February, Subandrio met with Cabinet in Canberra on the 11th. Following preliminary banter, Menzies began by saying that his Ministers were concerned that Australia and Indonesia not concentrate on the WNG issue at the expense of their common interests and agreement on all other matters. Beginning on the point where differences did occur, the Prime Minister said that the Australian position arose out of respect for the principle of sovereignty — a principle that favoured the Dutch in this case. None of this was particularly novel, and nor was the general idea that

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12 Circumstantial evidence for this view is provided by Cabinet's request on 5 February that both Menzies and Casey prepare a "further paper which would serve as a brief for the discussions." (See minutes of Cabinet meeting, 5 February 1959, in A4943, Vol. 1, NAA). Thus, although the resulting paper was signed by Casey alone, it is likely he had discussed its contents with the Prime Minister.
WNG was the only point of difference in the bilateral relationship and must not be allowed to dominate. His next comments, however, were different:

although it is the Australian view that sovereignty in West New Guinea belongs to the Netherlands, it is also the Australian view that settlement of the problem that has arisen is, in essence, a matter for the Netherlands and Indonesia, and not for Australia. It is certainly not Australia’s desire that this New Guinea matter should develop as if Australia were one of the principals to the dispute, or that the state of relations between Australia and Indonesia should be judged by statements from other sides about it.13

This represented a development of the fundamental idea put forward by Casey beforehand (and was, in fact, a basic outline of the most controversial part of the Casey-Subandrio statement). Casey had indicated Subandrio would be given a hint that change in Dutch policy would not necessarily mean Australia would maintain its current line. Now, Menzies had gone on to say that a solution was for the Indonesians and the Dutch to work out, and basically had nothing to do with Australia. He had evidently come to the conclusion that something sounding a little stronger than previously envisaged was needed for a positive affect on the Indonesians. He would not have thought the move substantially changed the intentions of the original proposal; the Dutch would be protected – they could not be forced to negotiate – Indonesia would be given the impression that the Australian position was, and always had been, eminently reasonable (Australia recognized the legality of properly conducted negotiations, yet had to support the Dutch because of their legally watertight case and political necessity), and the precautionary groundwork for abandonment of the WNG cause was in place. His mistakes, unrealized at the time, were that the latent bias of Australian policy could now be glimpsed by the Indonesians because Australia had always opposed negotiations and claimed to be a vitally interested party; it would never have given up these strategic points before. Menzies had tried to marry the decision for greater recognition of Indonesia in current WNG policy with the contingency plan favouring Indonesia, and it had not worked. Exposure of this bias in turn had important and immediate practical implications. The Indonesians could be emboldened to attempt rapid isolation of the Dutch, the Dutch might be fatally discouraged, and Australia had weakened its ability to intervene.

Subandrio picked up the signs of change and their ramifications, but did not immediately draw on them. He began with the claim that Indonesia was “seeking to

13 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 11 February 1959, in A4943, Vol. 1, NAA. For comparisons with previous statements on Australia’s direct interest in WNG, and antipathy to negotiations, see Spender’s comments to the First Committee, 24 and 29 November 1954, in The Question of West Irian in the United Nations, pp. 77, 124.
develop confidence and friendship with Australia”, and that he “had not made the visit with the intention of negotiating some manner of bargain involving the New Guinea issue but to discuss the facts, exchange views and to seek through commonsense an eventual solution to this problem.” He then skillfully touched on two issues at the forefront of Cabinet thinking in 1959; the value of Indonesia to Australia, and the dangers of communism in Indonesia. On the first, he said that Indonesia was “important to Australia from the point of view of Australia’s security.” Asia, he continued, was in a “fluid and unpredictable” state in the post-War era, and in the not impossible circumstance of aggression threatening Australia, “Indonesia can provide a first shield in Australia’s defence”. He seems to have implied, by soon moving to the communist problem, that the possibility of a ‘red’ Indonesia was a difficulty for Australia here. The domestic communist threat, moreover, could only be defeated by the central government by maintenance of links with the West, and by combining economic measures with political ones. Australia’s friendship – involving a “background of understanding…and not of suspicion” – was significant in all these respects. He did not go on to say that this friendship was, in turn, only capable of development if Australia did not continue to oppose Indonesia over WNG, but the thought can not have been far from his mind or that of his audience.

When Subandrio later moved on to discuss Irian specifically, he was careful not to threaten the Australians. He assured Cabinet that the Indonesian Government was “fully convinced” that “no territorial dispute can nowadays be settled through the use of force.” Continuing in a moderate vein, he said that Indonesia understood the Australian viewpoint and accepted that Australia could not “swallow” its convictions. Still, he felt that the current situation produced “an atmosphere of difficulty...especially in the public mind.” Seizing on Menzies’ earlier comment, he asked if – for the generation of a better atmosphere – the Prime Minister could say Australia did not oppose a solution to the problem of sovereignty or even an outright transfer. He also wondered if the Government could not even state that it would be “very glad” if a settlement was reached.

The remainder of the Cabinet meeting involved various questions such as reference of the dispute to the International Court, the security of ENG, and the early stages of disagreement between the Netherlands and Indonesia – none of which brought forth anything new. Casey did, however, re-emphasize the Prime Minister’s initial statement by saying that “Australia is not a party principal to the dispute” and that it “has never taken any lead or initiative.” Additionally, Menzies noted that the retirement
of Drees – who had had a “galvanising influence” on Dutch policy – might have an important effect on the Netherlands position. Spender, and then Casey, had in the past been careful not to give any impression that Australia was anything but strongly committed to the idea that it should have a central part in the resolution of the problem, or to expose their fears that the Dutch might give in, thus revealing cracks in the Dutch-Australian front. It is doubtful that this indication of shift went unnoticed by the Indonesians either.

The slant of comments in Cabinet certainly did not pass unobserved in External Affairs. In a memorandum for Casey and the Prime Minister entitled “Subandrio’s Visit – Next Steps”, Tange wrote that the meeting was excellent in creating a cordial atmosphere, but he expressed concern that Subandrio had gained an advantage at a number of points.\(^{14}\) Firstly, he thought that the Foreign Minister could declare that Australian Government policy was now founded entirely on a “legal interpretation...of Dutch rights”. Secondly, it could be said that Australian Ministers had seen the possibility that the Dutch might alter their position on these rights, and that, apart from the legal issue, they had not raised any objection to Indonesia acquiring the territory. Final concessions that Subandrio could claim were that Australia did not consider itself a party principal in the affair, that it would not attempt to act as one, and that the Ministers had not disagreed with the idea that the Netherlands should negotiate with the Indonesians.

Tange recommended that the defence of the Australian position should be widened beyond the legal by stressing that the Commonwealth Government was not sure incorporation of WNG into Indonesia took heed of native welfare or the right of self-determination. Perhaps in recognition of the fact that the Government had now reduced its room for manoeuvre, the Secretary also admitted that the best reply to the now real possibility that Subandrio would ask Australia to encourage negotiations on WNG would be silence and the (rather diversionary) comment that Australia would have to oppose Indonesia if the matter was raised in the UN. He concluded:

In short, I do not think the Cabinet should go any further towards providing Dr. Subandrio with the “gleam of hope” of a change in the Australian attitude: but rather that Ministers need to say other things and, in addition, tie him down to an agreed communiqué to avoid misunderstanding with the Dutch and/or public disagreement with Indonesia as to what our real attitude is.

\(^{14}\) See draft by Tange, 11 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
The cautionary note sounded by Tange alarmed the Ministers. They did not know how Subandrio had read the concession, but they saw that there were four possibilities: Subandrio might now misinterpret Australia's preferences over WNG; he might deliberately misrepresent these preferences; he might not care what these preferences were, knowing that Australian policy now contained an inherent weakness; and any of these responses by Subandrio might allow the Dutch to see for themselves that Australian policy was more conditional. On an international scale, these possibilities could result in a crisis in either Jakarta or The Hague, or further damage Australia's already weak ability to influence events. It had to be rammed home to Subandrio that Australia was thoroughly against any change in WNG, a statement had to be constructed to make sure the concession was not misused (and was blurred) – and hopefully both these moves would, if Subandrio had seen the deeper outlines of Australian policy, make him forget (as the Ministers initially had) that revelation of non-interference indicated a dormant bias in Australia's attitude.

Casey tried to make progress on these objectives a day later on the flight to Melbourne. He proposed to Subandrio that a joint *communique* be formulated, and later in the conversation he said that he would like to add to the Cabinet discussion by making it clear that self-determination "was a very important consideration in Australian policy." In a moment of wishful thinking, and perhaps wanting to jettison the concession completely, he also said that "Australia had hoped, and continued to hope, that the Dutch New Guinea question might be allowed to rest for a period – perhaps two or three years." Subandrio said politely that he was personally trying to "prevent tension" concerning WNG, and that there was no intention of placing the issue before the UN in 1959, but it was clear he would not agree to Irian returning to 'cold storage'. Sensing that the Australians were tightening, neither would he allow development of a situation in which the concession could be diluted beyond recognition. He said his acceptance of a joint *communique* would depend on how DNG was treated. He asked Casey to repeat his joint statement with Anak Agung (a former Indonesian Foreign Minister) of late 1955, whilst going "further". He hinted at what

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15 It is not clear what Tange's personal opinion of the state of Cabinet policy was, but there is evidence in his memorandum that he was not fully cognizant of the fact that Cabinet would now choose relations with Indonesia or a non-communist neighbour in an emergency. Whatever the case, his description of the way Subandrio could use what had been said was enough for Casey and Menzies to see that they had dangerously laid bare secret policy. For confirmation that Cabinet reassessed the position between the first and second meetings, see Casey's conversation with a member of the British Embassy recorded in telegram 96 from Canberra to CRO, 17 February 1959, in FO 371/144082, PRO.

16 Conversation between Subandrio and Casey, 12 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.

17 The relevant portion of the Casey-Anak Agung (Indonesian Foreign Minister, 1955) statement read: "The two Ministers agree that whilst maintaining their respective views on the West New Guinea question..."
was meant by this when, later in the conversation, he said that “the main thing he hoped to get out of his discussions...was an understanding that Australia would not object to the West New Guinea dispute being settled between the Dutch and Indonesia.” Realizing that Australia was now faced with considerable difficulty, Casey made no comment.

Casey had cleared away potential misconception about what Australia wanted for WNG, but because Subandrio had taken some control over the wording of a statement, the chance of deliberate misuse of the concession still existed. His firmness and perspicacity also suggested that he knew something of the real outlines of Australian policy, both present and contingent. And as for the Dutch, all this obviously meant they might still work out what Cabinet had said in secret on 5 January. The only choice, it turned out, was to give the Foreign Minister a version of the concession that put far greater emphasis on technical aspects, whilst thoroughly hedging it, in word and speech, with traditional WNG policy platitudes. This would not erase the possibility of Subandrio distorting Australian preferences over WNG, or of the Dutch seeing a shift in Australian policy. However, Subandrio might be encouraged again to forget what the concession showed of Australian policy, and be given less room to bastardize the communiqué. He could also still take away the feeling (as originally intended) that the Australian Government was not against Indonesia per se. The Dutch, for their part, might be convinced the concession was a theoretical exercise for the benefit of Australian-Indonesian relations. A pleasing irony of this acrobatic performance was that the statement could also continue to contain a precedent for reversal of Australian policy if necessary.

At a Cabinet meeting in Melbourne on 13 February, the Australians thus focussed on technical and political issues. Menzies began by announcing that discussions had been “very helpful”, but that “it was desirable to develop them a little further to ensure that no misunderstanding or confusion could arise between the parties as to the outcome.” After stressing the importance of NG in the mind of the Australian public, and the revulsion of the latter to the seizure in Indonesia of Dutch property, the Prime Minister moved on to the WNG problem. Australia, he re-asserted, was a bystander, yet it could not be an “indifferent by-stander”; it was a “very interested by-stander”, and its “great ambition” was to have WNG – along with ENG – developed to

the matter should be dealt with by means of peaceful discussion and with the firm desire to uphold peace and stability in the South East Asian area.” See Press Release, 2 November 1955, in A1209/23, 57/5298, pt 2, NAA.
18 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 13 February 1959, in A4943, Vol. 1, NAA.
the point of self-determination, and it was for this reason that an administrative agreement had been formed with the Netherlands. On the topic of sovereignty, Menzies said again that Australia believed the Dutch possessed it, and that it would only recognize a change that was brought about by the International Court, or free and fair negotiations between the parties principal. He also warned Subandrio that Australia could not urge the Dutch to sit down with the Indonesians.

It is impossible to know with certainty what, at this point, Subandrio thought the Australian position was. Nevertheless, it seems he believed Menzies and his Ministers were now more ready to come to terms with an Indonesian WNG than before, though they were worried about political fallout associated with rapid or violent transfer. His aim was therefore to get as much out of the Australians as would be useful for isolating the Dutch, without scaring the Liberal Government back into an ultra hard-line position. His method was to soothe and irritate Australian fears in a subtle manner. He began by saying that the Prime Minister's elucidation of the Australian stance was "realistic and fair and satisfactory", and that he realized the Government could not alter its position. He added that Indonesia was in no hurry for negotiations, and would not appeal to the UN in 1959. On the other hand, he spoke of "the emotional public feeling which exists in Indonesia, and particularly as it exists against Australia", and emphasized that whilst this might be unjustified, it had to be dealt with. He again talked of the importance of friendship with Australia as a symbol of Indonesia's relationship with the West, and the fluid and dangerous situation in Asia (by which he was doubtless referring to contingencies involving communist aggression). Indonesia wanted strong links with the West because of this, and "friendship with Australia [was] most important within this context." Unfortunately, relations with Australia stood "in need of improvement and they [would] only be improved by collective effort."

This, Subandrio must have thought, was the right atmosphere for discussion on the joint statement that began a short time later. Ambassador Helmi began with Subandrio's most ambitious objective; he requested that Australia might indicate that it was neutral towards the question of sovereignty. Menzies responded that Australia was not neutral on the question, and he repeated the outline of his Government's position. Seeing that Helmi's claim had failed, Subandrio said he wondered if it would be possible if an Australian profession of support for the Dutch could be omitted. The Australians, following the only route available, would not move. Menzies replied that he did not want a quarrel with the Dutch, and he had gone as far as any Australian Government could go. Still, he implied, this did not mean Australia was unreasonable;
he assured Subandrio that Australia would never interfere with a transfer to Indonesia properly negotiated and, pushed again by Helmi to "convey the feeling that Australia is not hostile to Indonesian claims", he said nebulously that a suitable form of words might be found.

Both groups would have been disappointed with this discussion. The Indonesians had not been able to extract more out of the Australians, and the latter had not been able to fool Subandrio. He had kept his head; he continued to appear to know that Australian policy was less solid, and he might seek to test the limits of Australian resolve at a later date.19 On the other hand, there were positives for both sides as well. For Cabinet, Subandrio had seen there were considerable obstacles in Australia to a vigorous campaign against the Dutch, and he had not pulled away from a statement (vital in connection with the Dutch, and for minimizing chances of Indonesia misusing the concession) in spite of Menzies' firmness during the talk. For Subandrio, a slightly more fearful Australian Government attitude than perhaps expected was seen over political repercussions to immediate change, but Australian vulnerability over WNG could still be discerned, and a concession – if technical – could be used against the Dutch and Australians in the international arena.

Before the talk ended, it had been agreed that the parties study a draft statement submitted by Casey, and that a meeting be held later between officials in an effort to agree on a draft that could be scrutinized by the Ministers. This meeting was held the next morning in Casey's residence at Berwick.20 The joint statement covered a number of issues apart from WNG, none of which proved points of disagreement. Regarding Irian, there was some bargaining,21 but the limitations revealed the day before provided the framework; the relevant segment of the final statement would have been as expected:

The Ministers reviewed in detail Indonesian-Australian relations. There was a full explanation of the considerations which have led each country to a different view over West New Guinea (West Irian), with Australia recognizing Netherlands sovereignty and recognizing the principle of self-determination. This difference remains, but the position was clarified by an explanation from the Australian Ministers that it followed from their position of respect for agreements on the rights of sovereignty that if any agreement were reached between the parties principal, arrived at by

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19 Conveying this sense of anxiety, a member of the British Embassy commented to London: "Casey emphasised to me that there had been no shift in Australia’s position. But I cannot help feeling that [the Australian Ministers] may be wondering whether they may not have gone too far in their statement that they would accept any agreement freely arrived at". Telegram 96 from Canberra to CRO, 17 February 1959, in FO 371/144082, PRO.

20 See record of 14 February meeting, completed by Plimsoll on 20 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/66/1, Pt 1, NAA.

21 After this, Casey rang Menzies in Canberra and attained approval for the final draft. See loc.cit.
peaceful processes and in accordance with internationally accepted principles, Australia would not oppose such an agreement.27

III

Unfortunately for Cabinet, neither large segments of the Australian public, nor the Dutch, accepted the Casey-Subandrio statement as a meaningless concession in aid of better bilateral relations. It was evident to them, as it had been to Subandrio, that the Government would not in the past have announced it would not oppose a settlement reached by the Dutch and the Indonesians. A change in policy, they thought, must have occurred. On February 16, Sydney’s *Daily Mirror* ran the front-page headline “N. G. “Sellout” Storm”, and described the Government’s decision not to oppose an agreement legally reached over WNG as “a complete turnaround in Australian foreign policy.”23 Similarly, an editorial in *The Sydney Morning Herald* said that Subandrio “left Australia yesterday with a remarkable diplomatic victory to his credit”, and that the notion that Australia could not effectively oppose a freely negotiated agreement made “nonsense of the attitude Australia has hitherto adopted on West New Guinea.”24 Casey also received a number of letters, including one from F. Bland of Murwillumbah, who wrote:

> The public is surprised at your weakness to the slit eyed Dr. Subandrio...you have sold Australian pride. Sold to people who worked hand in hand with the Japs....You also sold our best friends the Dutch....You have also given the Australian Soldier...away to our would be enemies. Have a bit of guts and don’t carry your weakness any further – you are too weak...I’l bet the slit eye’s having a laugh at you now. Change and be wise.25

It would be incorrect to assert that all the letters sent to the Minister of External Affairs were of this nature, though the above represented the views of most Australians interested in the issue.

The Dutch reaction, when it came, was also vehement. Four days after the announcement, Lovink, on behalf of his Government, wrote an urgent letter to Casey. He began by saying that “certain Netherlands circles”, who had always held that the US and Australia would oppose the transfer of WNG to Indonesia or any change in WNG’s status, now felt that such ideas appeared to be “without foundation” – a situation that would have repercussions on Netherlands policy.26 Furthermore, these circles felt that even if Australia indicated a preference for Netherlands sovereignty, the Dutch

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27 See DEA press release, 15 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA. Phelps’ version of events surrounding the joint statement focuses too much on the meeting at which the final wording was negotiated, and misses the complex background. See Phelps, *op.cit.*, pp. 306-10.
23 *Sydney Daily Mirror*, 16 February 1959. A selection of articles on the statement, including the latter, may be found in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 35, NAA.
25 F. Bland to Casey, 18 February 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 36, NAA.
26 Lovink to Casey, 19 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
Government need not take this into account, for the Australians had declared
themselves happy with any agreement reached between the Netherlands and Indonesia.
Although Lovink said that this line of thought was "of course...very unwelcome to my
government", it was clear that the "circles" mentioned included the Dutch Cabinet.
Their observations therefore contained something of a threat. Casey was asked to
urgently consider making a public statement clarifying the reasons why Australia would
not encourage negotiations or the institution of any process that would lead to transfer
to Indonesia. Lovink continued:

My Government considers it of the utmost importance that the Australian Government makes it
perfectly clear that the theoretical acceptance of a hypothetical agreement between the
Netherlands and Indonesia on the question of Netherlands New Guinea has merely and purely
merit in the juridical sense and from a standpoint of international law, but that from a point of
view of practical politics Australia attaches the greatest importance to a peaceful and undisturbed
continuation of the present development of the whole island of New Guinea, as envisaged in the
Australian-Netherlands declaration of November, 1957.

Lovink concluded by noting that by Casey's statement to the House of February 18
regarding Subandrio's visit strengthened the interpretation of the various "circles" in the
Netherlands, an interpretation "which, it is found, is very hard to disprove."27

Faced with an irate public, and a vulnerable and potentially fatally discouraged
Netherlands Government on the eve of a Dutch election,28 the Australians were forced
to take urgent, if not entirely unexpected, palliative action. An advantage that Cabinet
did have was that the public and the Dutch were not privy, as Subandrio had been, to the
first Cabinet meeting from which the trouble arose. Only the final result could be seen,
which, while including the concession, had been made more defensible. Another
convenience was that any comment now made on the concession was not subject to
Subandrio's veto, as the statement had been; the truth could be bent a little further.
Menzies made full use of these benefits in a juridically centred, and partially deceptive,
statement to parliament on 24 February.29 Opening with a declaration of Australian

27 In his report, Casey said that Australia's non-opposition to an agreement between the Dutch and
Indonesians "represents no new departure in our policy, but I believe it does clarify to Indonesia a
position upon which they have held doubts...I would judge from some public comments on the terms of
this particular part of the joint announcement that some unwarranted assumptions are being made. One of
them is that, if there were an agreement between the Netherlands and Indonesia, only one result in terms
of the future of the western half of the New Guinea is possible. I suggest that, on the contrary, there is a
variety of possibilities, depending largely upon the decision of the Netherlands and Indonesia to accept
28 In a further letter from Lovink on February 21, the Dutch used the pretext of an upcoming election
speech by Luns - "who would find it impossible not to touch on the subject of the Australian views on the
result of the visit of...Dr. Subandrio" - as a means of applying further pressure on the Liberal Government
to present an official statement based on the outlines of past references to the WNG issue. See letter from
Lovink to Tange, 21 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
policy, the Prime Minister made five points. The first was that the Government had supported, and continued to support, Dutch sovereignty. Secondly, if Dutch control was to change, it would have to be done in accordance with international law and, thirdly, the Australians would accept the jurisdiction of the International Court, but not that of the General Assembly. Here, Menzies said his Government advocated reference to the Court — something that the Dutch had been prepared to do, while the Indonesians had not. Finally, it was claimed that Australia had “always maintained that the paramount interest ultimately is that of the indigenous population” — a view that recognized sovereignty, and yet saw the future in the light of self-determination. This was deliberately misleading, for even after realizing that the blunder of the first Cabinet meeting had to be redressed, Papuan welfare had been only one of a series of political factors used by Menzies and Casey to brace a legal argument.\(^{30}\)

Moving on to the question of whether there had been any change in Australian policy during Subandrio’s visit, Menzies continued to construct a smokescreen. He endeavoured to offset acceptance of a negotiated settlement by suggesting that although the Liberal position was presented to Subandrio in a juridical sense, it had been made clear that Australian policy was unchanged for practical purposes. For example, he said the Foreign Minister had been told Australia would recognize a Dutch-Indonesian agreement, but it did not follow that Australia was not deeply concerned about the future of WNG’s inhabitants; we “expect”, he continued, a program aimed at self-determination, similar to that in operation in ENG. In reality, Menzies had said that it was Australia’s “great ambition” to have WNG developed in the same way as the other side of the island, and that his Government “respects sovereignty as it now exists and would respect immediately and without ill-will any altered sovereignty if the alteration were reached by the proper process of the law”.\(^{31}\) In other words, he had told Subandrio that self-determination was Australia’s current objective, yet it would neither oppose nor even harbour bitterness vis-à-vis any future arrangement legally reached.

As a corollary to the idea that Australia expected self-determination to be a continuing priority in WNG regardless of the nature of the administration, and that the Government had not forgotten its “special relations” with the Netherlands or the joint declaration of 1957, Menzies stressed towards the end of his speech that

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\(^{30}\) In fact, Plimsoll of the DEA had been uneasy about use of the word “paramount”, and felt that the Prime Minister’s fifth point was “too categorical in relation to what we said to Subandrio”. See covering note to Menzies’ draft, 23 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.

\(^{31}\) Emphasis mine. See minutes of Cabinet meeting, 13 February 1959, in A4943, Vol. 1, NAA.
We...have a lively and continuing interest in the result of any negotiations should the Netherlands, freely of its own free will, decide to engage in them. We would therefore naturally expect our voice to be heard on matters which affect the future of New Guinea.

This did not, of course, mirror the general tenor of talks with Subandrio, but the attempt to cover-up accidentally revealed changes in Australian policy was successful regarding the Dutch Government and the Australian public. Representing the former, Luns demonstrated that he was unaware of the new bias in Australian policy towards Indonesia by declaring the statements as “good”, despite saying that the initial reference to hypothetical negotiations was regrettable. In Australia, the press fracas soon died down, and the Opposition was able to make little capital out of a Government policy that was now more carefully guarded.

The outcome was not completely positive, however. There was disconcerting confirmation that the Netherlands might change policy; Opposition parties and public opinion were shown to be fragile. Baron van Tuyll was perhaps more correct in saying that the position of the Dutch Government, in terms of public opinion, had been weakened by the Subandrio visit, and that whilst a lot had been done...to soften the original impact of the Communique on the minds of those interested in the question...when the subject came up in political circles, those advocating a firm adherence to the present policy would have the Australian declaration in the Communique used against them.

In Australia, the controversy had made clear that it would not be easy for the Government to introduce changes on WNG smoothly if these proved necessary. A memorandum for Tange by three members of the DEA’s South and South East Asia Branch explained that cleavages in public opinion had immediately become obvious after the 15th. Apart from those who favoured the communique, there was a group that found fault with the announcement, believing that “it reflected a weakening of our opposition to Indonesian occupation of Netherlands New Guinea.” “Their criticism”, the memorandum continued, “appeared motivated in varying degrees by concern for

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32 An officer in the DEA questioned the use of the word “result” and asked: “Does this reflect [the] atmosphere of [the] Melbourne talks with Subandrio?” See attachment by J. P. Quinn (Assistant Secretary, DEA) on Menzies’ draft, 23 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 1, NAA.
33 Cablegram 39 from McCarthy, 25 February 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 36, NAA.
34 E. McCarthy (Australian Ambassador to the Netherlands) to Tange, 9 April 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 37, NAA. Van Tuyll reinforced this sentiment on the same day: “In the discussion in the past within political circles, the point had constantly been made that Australia wanted the Dutch to stay...The fact that a weakening by the Dutch in the face of Indonesian claims would be questioned by Australia was a point that weighed quite a lot with those who were required to review it within the political parties”. See loc.cit.
35 Memorandum by R. N. Hamilton (Officer, SEA Section, DEA), Quinn, and an unidentified officer, to Tange, 27 February 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 36, NAA.
Australian security and by moral considerations.” After canvassing these two motives in detail, the paper concluded with a significant section entitled “Limits to future action”:

Should any change in the status quo be envisaged, it will be necessary in formulating policy to take into account the strong body of opinion which...distrusts Indonesia and opposes direct Indonesian influence into New Guinea...[and which] demands that self-determination should be safeguarded for all Papuans... It would therefore seem necessary for Australia to work towards a situation in which, should the Dutch decide to modify their present policy, Australia would be immediately consulted and would be in a position to influence the direction of the settlement to take account of both security requirements and self-determination. Outright Indonesian occupation would run counter to widely expressed public opinion on both these aspects.

A third negative for Cabinet in the aftermath were indications of Indonesian perceptions of the visit which, if differing, were uniformly worrying. Sukarno had not been impressed enough by Subandrio’s feats to give a personal guarantee that force would not be used against Irian. He was therefore perhaps continuing to consider more violent options. Subandrio, meanwhile, showed that he still believed Australian policy had changed, commenting to McIntyre that “the Indonesian Government would in practice expect to consult us but to admit this publicly would resurrect the fear here that Australia would block any move towards settlement.”

Subandrio’s visit, along with rumblings in the Netherlands, Australia, and Jakarta, were clear demonstrations for Cabinet that the policy instituted in January would provide no instant elixir for the WNG-Indonesia problem. Not only had it proved exceptionally difficult to enmesh greater recognition of Indonesia’s importance within the fabric of a relatively traditional WNG policy, but the process of trying had reemphasized that the alternative of an ‘emergency’ transfer to Indonesia would be both difficult to avoid and highly unpalatable. However, as ‘difficult’ was not yet thought ‘impossible’, Cabinet’s answer to this was to push, if unhappily, the policy of 5 January even harder.

IV

The intentions behind the torturous manoeuvres of the Menzies Cabinet during Subandrio’s visit were consistent with the earlier decisions that had themselves revealed a Ministerial view of Australia as a heavily reduced power. Certainly, Cabinet had shown that in trying for a policy previously appropriate to a particular status, it could no longer behave as if it was in complete possession of that status. The concession, for instance, exhibited recognition that the balance of power was changing in Indonesia’s favour, even as it doubled as a means of minimizing damage caused by denial of WNG

36 Cablegram 114 from McIntyre, 27 February 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 36, NAA.
to Indonesia. Though the Government hoped to have the Dutch hold on in WNG, as attempts to temper the concession suggested, it could no longer treat Indonesia with contempt.

These sentiments were not entirely shared by the electorate. Reaction to the Casey-Subandrio statement disclosed that in 1959 Cabinet’s perceptions of the country’s decline as a middle power were not representative of ‘Australia’s’ position in the same way that views of Australia’s dominance had been through most of the 1950’s. Public and Government opinion was split. A large proportion of the former did not believe the aims of the Indonesian Government, or events in the Republic, warranted a change in policy on Australia’s sphere of influence.37 Australia, it was thought, had the necessary power to maintain an independent policy, and because it did so, any sign of weakness – especially as the Cold War escalated in SEA – was inexcusably foolish.38

With this division in mind, along with the public realisation in January 1962 of Australian limitations, it is possible see early 1959 as part of a period of transition for Australia. Important components of what constituted the nation had surrendered the notion that Australia could deal with the area south of Singapore in a different manner to mainland SEA – yet other important groups in Australia had lagged behind in the redefinition of post-War reality, and were only to catch up later.

37 Gallup Polls of 1956 and 1958 showed an increase of approximately 10% of those favouring a United Nations trusteeship over WNG (see Aitkin and Wolfers, op.cit., p. 204). This appears to indicate greater recognition that the Australian Government was not in a position to implement its preferences. However, support for Indonesia in the polls was little changed, and the vast bulk of those with an opinion continued to want direct Australian or Dutch control.

38 Memories of Darwin, the Kokoda Trail, and the Owen Stanley Range might have meant less to the teenage or 20 to 30 year old generation, but they were vivid for those who had lived and worked in the war years, and who believed that invasion had been narrowly avoided. This group perhaps composed the bulk of those bitterly opposed to the joint statement.
Subandrio’s visit obviously reflected the anxiety of the Menzies Government to pay heed to new priorities regarding Indonesia, but the Australians did not forget the basic tactic endorsed as necessary for keeping alive the hope of holding the Dutch to WNG – that of deterrence. It was therefore natural that they were fully immersed in the intense communication over the possibility of an attack that occurred between the Netherlands, Australia, Britain, and the US in a period beginning just prior to Subandrio’s tour. This phenomenon climaxed in a tripartite meeting of July between the latter three, and yet, from Australia’s viewpoint, even this high-point of support for the Dutch was moderated, as had been the moves leading to it, by the now ever-present guiding force in Australian policy: the Indonesian problem. In fact, the pattern of Liberal Government strategy clear in these events, and founded by the decisions of 5 January – that is, letting the principal importance of Indonesia influence policy without destroying the minimal means of retaining a Dutch presence in WNG – was to be repeated for months to come. Certainly, by March 1960, Cabinet had become so dogged in its pursuit of the chosen policy that, in the face strong internal and external pressures for change, it explicitly reaffirmed the resolutions of 14 months before.

As had been alluded to by Cabinet on 5 January, the Australian Government received news from the US and UK early in the new year that calmed fears of an attack by Indonesia in March. Menzies and his colleagues were therefore relieved of the need to evolve a makeshift response to an immediate threat. Nevertheless, they believed that they were still faced with the mid-term chance of both an invasion and, or, a Dutch withdrawal. Casey, for example, wrote to Beale that “On the question of deterrents, we are becoming increasingly conscious here that their purpose is not merely to try to prevent Indonesian military action but, perhaps even more important, to persuade the Dutch to stay in New Guinea.”

The deterrence issue was, of course, not a simple one for Canberra given the state of Australian WNG policy. The Dutch had to be encouraged without being given any military guarantee, and the Indonesians discouraged without being offended, and

1 See minutes of Cabinet meeting, A4943/Vol. 1, NAA. The American and British reports are still classified; see A1838/269, TS666/111, NAA.
2 Cablegram 55 from Casey to Beale, 16 January 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 7, NAA.
3 In January, the Dutch again applied substantial pressure on the Australians to give an answer on the question of military planning and an assurance.
all this had to be done without falling out of synchrony with the US and UK. In fact, Cabinet, by insisting that Australia’s major allies be pushed to warn the Indonesians against aggression, had made clear in January that it considered cooperation with these two countries central to the success of deterrence.

Making the achievement of these basic aims potentially more difficult was a renewed Dutch campaign in January for military planning and a promise of active support. On the 9th, Lovink requested an interview with Menzies, making it clear he would broach these problems, and the Ambassador gave his personal opinion that “if [Australia] waited even a year to give the Dutch a military assurance, it would be too late.” The Prime Minister decided that, for the moment, it would be “bad tactics” to go through with the Cabinet decision to inform the Netherlands that Australia would be unable to accede to its requests. Rather, he would “say something to Lovink about the difficulties we were in[,] which would help prepare the Dutch for our decision when they were given it.” This he did, telling the Ambassador that his Government had not made a final determination, but that “there were very great difficulties about an arrangement with the Netherlands which was made independently of the United States and United Kingdom”; Australia and the Netherlands did not want to be “left out on a limb”, unable to cope with Indonesia in partnership with the communists, and neither did Australia want to find itself “in a state of hostility towards an Asian country and conceivably other Asian countries.” On staff talks, Menzies also said “there were great difficulties” – in this instance “because it was not possible to keep such matters private.” Lovink, according to Menzies, indicated that he understood these problems, but was “deeply concerned about establishing a proposition that both the Netherlands and Australia were deeply anxious to maintain Dutch rule and to deny the claim of sovereignty made by Indonesia.” This enabled the Prime Minister to lead on to a more comfortable subject for Australia by stressing that the Dutch should publicize their willingness to have the International Court make a judgement on WNG, and that they should work with the Australians to make the US and UK aware that an invasion would force Indonesia into the communist orbit (because the British and the Americans would be forced to cut off arms to Indonesia, leaving Jakarta entirely open to communist influence). To deter Indonesia from using force was therefore essential for the West.

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4 Conversation between Plimsoll and Lovink, 9 January 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 7, NAA.
5 See “Note for File” by Plimsoll, 16 January 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 7, NAA.
6 Conversation between Menzies and Lovink in memorandum by Menzies for DEA, 16 January 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 7, NAA.
Menzies felt that the talk went well – that it was “conducted on a footing of complete mutual understanding” – but the complexities associated with deterrence, combined with heightened Dutch anxiety, had hardly evaporated. Fortunately for the Australians, a number of circumstances, ironically related to Dutch pressure, contrived to reduce the difficulties of dealing with this puzzle. Not least amongst these was persistent pressure by the British for greater coordination between Western powers over NNG. Outwardly obscure, their motives for this were linked to the concurrence of Dutch agitation and the decision to sell arms to the Indonesians. After agreeing to supply 18 Gannet aircraft to the Republic – and this transaction was economically important to the UK – the British were approached by the Dutch concerning the possibility of a guarantee of assistance if an attack on WNG occurred. Presumably due to the importance of their European relationship with the Dutch and, as Selwyn Lloyd said to Dulles, because the UK was “inclined to accept [the] Dutch argument that countries supplying arms were thereby under moral obligation to see that these arms were not used against New Guinea”, the British went some of the way towards meeting the Dutch. On 27 February, a note presented to the Netherlands Ambassador in London read:

Her Majesty’s Government sincerely hope that the Indonesian Government will in fact adhere to their declared policy of refraining from using force to prosecute their claim to Netherlands New Guinea. If, nevertheless, the Indonesian Government should resort to force, Her Majesty’s Government would give their support to the Netherlands Government. Her Majesty’s Government cannot enter into a commitment to provide military support but they would do everything in their power to assist the Netherlands Government in other ways.

Later, after Dutch pressure, the British replaced the word “other” with “appropriate”, though they made it clear that this did not alter the substance of their commitment; the promise to give military reinforcement was excluded, yet the possibility still existed. The Dutch had also asked London to warn the Indonesians against the use of force. They also agreed to this; on 3 February, Lloyd had called in the Indonesian Ambassador and said to him “that if there should be any fighting [the] United Kingdom Government were bound to be against Indonesia.” Having given in to The Hague on both counts,

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7 83rd Conclusions, Cabinet meeting of 4 December 1958, Cab 128, CC (58), PRO.
8 CRO circular telegram, 18 February 1959, in FO 371/144082, PRO.
9 The need to have arms sales endorsed by NATO, of which the Netherlands and some of its supporters were a part, was another reason behind the British request. See 12th Conclusions, Cabinet meeting of 26 February 1959, Cab 128, CC (59), PRO.
10 Note handed by J. D. Profumo (Minister of State for Foreign Affairs) to Baron Bentinck (Netherlands Ambassador to the UK), 27 February 1959, in FO 371/144082, PRO.
11 Lloyd to Bentinck, 17 March 1959, in FO 371/144082, PRO.
12 See memorandum by J. O. McCormick (FO, position unidentified), 22 December 1958, in FO 371/144080, PRO.
13 See CRO telegram 121 to Canberra, 6 February 1959, in FO 371/144082, PRO.
the British believed there were other issues they should deal with. Firstly, they wanted to decide, in concert with the Americans and Australians, exactly what would be done for the Dutch if an invasion took place and, secondly, they were now vitally interested in devising ways to prevent the development of such a situation.14

As the British became more deeply caught in the web surrounding a possible attack, they had attempted to involve the US and Australia in their problem. On 4 February, the Australians were told that the UK was going to ask the Americans for their views on the idea of discussions between the US, Britain, and Australia “to concert plans for deterrent action”.15 W. S. Bates of the UK High Commission in Canberra was told a week later that an Australian response would not be given until after Subandrio’s visit,16 and that there were doubts as to whether the US would be keen on such talks, but the Australians were of course interested in such a notion. Indeed, they had already made efforts to talk with the US in more detail about deterrents, suggesting consultations “on [the] possible course of events in [the] event of an Indonesian attack”,17 and as Quinn noted, “Australian participation in the proposed consultations would appear to be absolutely consistent with [the] Cabinet decision of 5th January and with the Minister’s submission”.18

On the same day that the Australians were approached, Selwyn Lloyd proposed to Dulles that a “joint study” be held on the “possibility of Indonesian action against New Guinea and any further means of deterring the Indonesians.”19 Dulles agreed, provided the Dutch were not included. There were a number of reasons why the Secretary of State was interested in comparing assessments and, particularly, in finding the means to hinder an Indonesian assault.20 The heart of the problem for the Americans was that war would put them in an unenviable position regarding relations with both

14 An Anglo-Dutch assessment of the end of January on the likelihood of an Indonesian invasion “played down” the chance of a “substantial military attack… but agreed that there was some evidence of Indonesian plans… and [the] possibility of an attack by a force of 1,000 strong could not be ignored.” See cablegram 364 from London, 24 January 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 7, NAA.
15 “Note for File” by M. C. Timbs (Assistant Secretary, Cabinet Division, Prime Minister’s Department), 4 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 7, NAA.
16 Conversation between Quinn and W. S. Bates (Counsellor, UK High Commission), 11 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 7, NAA.
17 Cablegram 55 from Casey to Beale, 16 January 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 7, NAA.
18 See memorandum by Quinn on UK proposals, undated, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 7, NAA.
19 See CRO telegram 134 to Canberra, 10 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 7, NAA.
20 A precedent for an exchange of assessments (a matter that, on its own, and especially given the US belief that an imminent attack was unlikely, was more innocuous than consultations) had already been set by Dulles’ suggestion to Luns that the US and the Netherlands compare intelligence estimates. See telegram 26 from Dulles to Washington, 18 December 1958, in FRUS, Vol. XVII, 1958-60, ‘Indonesia’, p. 313.
Indonesia and the Netherlands – two nations of importance in US foreign policy.\textsuperscript{21} The Dutch, in a conflict, would expect US backing, and the more so since Dulles had held out the prospect of logistic support.\textsuperscript{22} In fact, Dulles had gone further than this, mentioning in NATO that he had warned Subandrio “that if Indonesia were to take offensive action against Netherlands New Guinea they would find us against them.”\textsuperscript{23} The Americans had therefore assumed an obligation to do something for the Dutch in a conflict.\textsuperscript{24} However, if the US did act against Indonesia – even if secretly over logistics, and in a token manner in the UN – it feared losing all that had been gained since the US-Indonesian relationship was at an all-time low during the civil war.

II

Partly for practical purposes,\textsuperscript{25} further movement toward multilateral talks did not occur until May. When progress was again made, the Australians and Americans demonstrated that they were not interested in ‘high-powered’ discussions. Just prior to an official proposal by the UK for three-way discussions, the Australians told British officials that they were happy to look at existing deterrents, and ways of reinforcing them, but apparently added that they did not want military discussions.\textsuperscript{26} The Americans, for their part, said they would agree to talks, but declared themselves “not wildly enthusiastic” about British ideas on the agenda – which included the suggestion that a decision be made about whether (and when) joint planning should occur if preparations for an attack were obvious, and that consideration should be given to deterrents such as joint amphibious exercises in the SEA area and support for

\textsuperscript{21} A National Security Council report of 3 February, approved by Eisenhower, had confirmed “a U.S. policy of neutrality in the West New Guinea dispute... because of the seriously adverse consequences which would ensue if the United States supported either the Dutch or the Indonesian position.” See NSC 5901, in \textit{ibid.}, p. 340.

\textsuperscript{22} There is no record in \textit{FRUS} of a specific promise by Dulles of logistic support (see conversation between Dulles and van Roijen, 8 October 1958, in \textit{ibid.}, pp. 294-96, and telegram 26 from Dulles to Washington, 18 December 1958, (refer also to following footnotes), \textit{ibid.}, p. 313), but Luns later demonstrated an awareness of a pledge in this regard. See telegram 1231 from Young, 29 January 1959, \textit{ibid.}, p. 332.

\textsuperscript{23} Cablegram 333 from McClure-Smith, 20 December 1958, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 34, NAA.

\textsuperscript{24} The US was also under increased pressure from the Dutch in 1959 to continue building private deterrents, and move in a similar way in the public sphere. See conversation between Dulles and van Roijen, 14 January 1959, and telegram 1231 from P. Young (US Ambassador to the Netherlands), 29 January 1959, in \textit{FRUS}, Vol. XVII, 1958-60, ‘Indonesia’, p. 320 and p. 332 respectively.

\textsuperscript{25} Key officials in Washington were away during April and into May. See cablegram 666 from Washington, 2 April 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.

\textsuperscript{26} See cablegram 1101 from Washington, 19 May 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA. An instructive cable (284 from Canberra) was referred to by Beale, but has not been found. However, see reference to it in cablegram 839 from Canberra, 3 July 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
Indonesian dissidents.\textsuperscript{27} It was also added that low-level discussions were strongly favoured in order to avoid press speculation.

The Americans were averse to making much of the talks for two reasons. Firstly, they believed that verbal warnings to the Indonesians had worked so far, and would probably do so in the future. Secondly, they were as sensitive as ever over anything that might upset the drive to defeat communism in the archipelago. They were now massively committed to the policy of gaining leverage through the Army and key figures in the central government. The $14.9 million arms deal announced by Eisenhower in December 1958 had, in reality, been worth much more, and it was soon augmented by secret aid of much greater proportions.\textsuperscript{28} By mid-1959, US military assistance owed to Indonesia, together with that from other Western countries, was to outweigh the orders placed with the communist bloc.\textsuperscript{29} In outbidding the Soviet Union and its allies, the Americans also seemed to be winning the Cold War in Indonesia. Not only had the Djuanda Government postponed elections, Sukarno, with the support of the increasingly influential Army, had moved in April to introduce "Guided Democracy" and the return of Indonesia's Constitution of 1945. This was seen as an exciting development by the Americans, as described by Robertson:

> The 1945 Constitution...provides for a strong, executive form of government...as opposed to the parliamentary system under the present constitution...The effect of this decision by the Indonesian Government, if carried out along the lines stated would appear to be to reduce the powers currently exercised by the political parties and the Parliament, while strengthening the hand of the President and his advisors (including the Army)[;]....the power of the PKI could be eclipsed.\textsuperscript{30}

From Washington's perspective, the decline of Indonesia's democratic institutions was positive, because the PKI's only real means of gaining power was via the parliamentary system.\textsuperscript{31} United States policy-makers were nevertheless wise to the chance that such 'progress' might be ephemeral. Sukarno, for instance, was still flirting with the Russians, as his visit in May to the USSR showed,\textsuperscript{32} and at mid-year the attempt in Jakarta to push through constitutional change was at a delicate point (in terms of domestic politics).\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{27} Cablegram 1143 from Washington, 25 May 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
\textsuperscript{28} Kahin & Kahin, op.cit., p. 207.
\textsuperscript{29} loc.cit.
\textsuperscript{31} Kahin & Kahin, op.cit., p. 211.
\textsuperscript{32} See telegram from Jones to Robertson, 21 May 1959, in FRUS, Vol. XVII, 1958-60, 'Indonesia', pp. 381-82.
\textsuperscript{33} See Robertson to C. D. Dillon (Acting Secretary of State), 7 May 1959, in ibid., p. 376.
In 1959, the Australians had enthusiastically continued their support for US policy in Indonesia, and thus shared the concerns of authorities in Washington not to upset pleasing trends by setting in train a process that would favour the Dutch. On top of this, as already noted, and again closely reflecting American thoughts, the Menzies Government had become increasingly confident since the scare of late 1958 that Indonesia had taken note of UK and US warnings, and would not attack WNG (at least in the near future). There was consequently no need to incur the risks of over-committing to the Dutch, and of offending the Indonesians by going beyond political measures. A final motive was that the Australians did not want to encourage anything, unless deemed absolutely essential, that cut across US desires; they wanted to feed the US-Australian relationship as symbolized by efforts to protect bilateral communication on Indonesia during the year — so as to maintain US interest in Indonesia and SEA.

Australian and American views ensured that nothing spectacular ensued from the consultations when they eventually happened. The first meeting — which took place in absolute secrecy — was at the State Department on 7 July. It was not held at a high level; the British were represented by Walter De La Mare (counsellor, UK Embassy, Washington), the Americans by Mein, and the Australians by M. R. Booker (Australian Embassy, Washington). Starting with a review of the effectiveness of deterrence, De La Mare gave evidence of the cancellation of an Indonesian attempt on WNG owing to warnings from the US and UK. Mein said they had evidence along similar lines, and asked “whether in view of the present situation there was any need to explore at length the possibility of any further forms of action.” He added that he thought the best course was “to simply continue more of what we were doing.” The Australians supported this line, and it was subsequently agreed that it was not wise to push Subandrio for more assurances of non-aggression, but rather that other key individuals should be approached. It was further decided that a list of such people should be drawn up, and spoken to at an expedient moment. This strategy could occur on a continuing basis; “As

34 See p. 4 of cablegram 132 from Casey to Menzies, 14 May 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
35 There was also an anxiety to gain access to thinking within the US policy-making circle. See cablegram 559 from Beale to Casey, in A1209/54, 59/260, NAA.
36 See, for example, *loc.cit.*, and cablegram 202 to Washington 28 February 1959, in the same file.
37 For the record of this meeting see cablegram 1473 from Washington, 8 July 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
38 This was Tange’s idea. See teletype message from Tange to Casey, 2 July 1959, and cablegram 839 to Washington, 3 July 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
new leaders emerged the opportunity should be taken of reminding them of existing commitments and probing their attitudes."

This was the main result to emerge from the conference. The British did suggest that the question of the kind of military planning required in an emergency might be examined, along with the specific military problems that could occur if an invasion took place. Mein commented that the US would not enter into such planning unless it were decided that military action would be taken by Washington in the event of an attack. He did not feel that such a decision would be made in the foreseeable future. Thus, the only decision of substance was that the three countries would continue on a long-term basis to seek private assurances that Indonesia would not use force – a development that suited the Americans and Australians, and perhaps the British, in spite of the rejection of a number of their proposals.39 Unsurprisingly, no further talks took place, as foreseen by the Australian Embassy in Washington:

our impression is that the State Department feels that for the present there is little more to say on the question of political deterrence....If...you do not wish us to put forward any specific proposals we would expect that discussions would tend to lapse.40

Beale, of course, was not given any "specific proposals".

III

The retention of a degree of Australian self-assuredness over WNG, associated with deterrence, should not be allowed to distract from the reality that the Menzies Government attitude was still bounded by greater fear and dependence than it previously had been. Deterrence was itself a method of maintaining a policy profoundly limited by these factors, as the context of its reaffirmation on 5 January showed, but so was its operation, as the events ending with tripartite consultations demonstrated.

The scrupulous care taken by the Australians in ensuring deterrence was as inoffensive as possible mirrored the reasons for why such dissuasion was initially believed necessary. The Australians were fearful of Indonesia’s current capabilities, and what these – and the Republic’s intentions – might be in future. That Canberra was more cautious than London in becoming involved in joint discussions was of course representative of an attitude to Indonesia that continued to be extraordinary. A similar observation applies to unwillingness during talks, in concert with the Americans, to go

39 The Australians were “puzzled by the scope of [the] United Kingdom’s proposals”, but concluded that “their principal motive was to demonstrate an active interest in Indonesian affairs.” See cablegram 1613 from Washington, 28 July 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
40 loc.cit.
beyond political measures. In terms of dependence, the fact that the success of Australian WNG policy was judged in large part by the effectiveness of measures primarily taken by outside powers is enough to illustrate how reliant the Government had seen Australia should, and had to, become in connection with its immediate north.

In general, therefore, the state of relative repose within the Liberal Government over WNG was revealing of the view that the chosen policy was effectual, not that the rationale for choosing it had become invalid. Australia was a weakened power, fortunately able - by prevailing circumstance, and the goodwill and strength of the US and UK - to hold to its former sphere of influence, but no more. The days of former glory had, in Cabinet’s view, by no means returned.

IV

Confident mid-year that deterrence was working, and that Western policy in Indonesia was likewise succeeding, the Australian Government was not forced during the remainder of the 1959 to consider making WNG policy any more favourable to Indonesia than it had during Subandrio’s visit. Rather, it was able to concentrate on political means of spurring the Dutch to remain, and of trying to build up the Australian-Indonesian relationship.

In May, after months of uncertainty, a new Dutch government was formed. There had been speculation that elections and Drees’ retirement could result in a substantially weaker stand on WNG, but in his inaugural address, the new Prime Minister, J. E. De Quay, declared that “policy will continue to be directed towards giving the population of this territory the opportunity...to determine their future political status themselves.” On top of this, Luns told McCarthy that “there was an understanding, not for publication, among the parties forming the Government that there would be no negotiation...with Indonesia”.

These were gratifying events from the viewpoint of the Liberal Government, yet Dutch fortitude was still potentially both brittle and damaging. Put otherwise, the Australians had to continue avoiding accession to Dutch pressures to the point of jeopardizing objectives in Indonesia, whilst managing not to engender fatal discouragement at The Hague. This was not an easy task. The Dutch needed to be further reassured about possible implications for Australian policy of Subandrio’s visit, and they expressed concerns that Australia was not doing enough to prevent the US and

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41 Record of address by J. E. De Quay (Netherlands Prime Minister) to Dutch parliament, 26 May 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 37, NAA.
42 Cablegram 96 from McCarthy to Casey, 22 May 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 37, NAA.
UK from selling offensive arms to Indonesia. Moreover, though demands by the Netherlands on Australia eased for some time after Menzies’ talk to Lovink on 9 January, Luns had begun to push again in March and April – this time for “full and frank exchanges of [military] information through existing channels.” This request had apparently been ignored by use of the convenient decoy of agreeing to a Dutch plea for the secret use by Netherlands forces (in the case of war with Indonesia) of Australian transit facilities. But the Australians knew that with Luns’ return to Government, the precarious task of dealing with vigorous Dutch agitation had hardly ended with such a move.

In a visit to The Hague in late June, Menzies did his best to set the Dutch at ease, without agreeing to any new commitments. In discussions with de Quay and van Tuyll, he began with an account of Subandrio’s visit, and declared that “there had been no change of policy”; Australia “still believed that the Dutch claim to retain Western New Guinea was a just claim and this had been conveyed to Subandrio.” His explanation of the controversial portion of the joint statement was that “words could be given different shades of meanings but it seemed to him that if it were accepted that the Dutch had the right to regard Western New Guinea as a possession it would be difficult to question their right to deal with it in any way they wished.” De Quay was not properly briefed on this matter, but van Tuyll was unimpressed. The Netherlands Government, he said, “were not now in the position to say to the critics of the Government’s policy…that their friends, particularly Australia, wished them to do so” (that is, push on with self-determination regardless of Indonesian opinion). Menzies, probably redenning, had nothing to give in response.

On the American and British supply of arms, Menzies did not introduce any new ideas. He said it was “difficult to deny the right of Indonesia, or any country, to buy arms for its own security”, and that if the Republic failed to acquire them from the West, it would, contrary to Western interests, turn to the communists. Nevertheless, he went on, “it would be wrong indeed” if US and UK arms were used to attack WNG, and Australia “would feel obliged” to bring this to the attention of these two Governments (even though Australia felt this had been “kept in mind” by the British and Americans).

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43 Regarding arms, see conversation between Lovink and Casey, 24 April 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 37, NAA.
44 Cablegram 53 from McCarthy, 19 March 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 37, NAA. See also cablegram 65 from McCarthy in the same file.
45 See minutes of Cabinet meeting, 10 April 1959, in A4943, Vol. 1, NAA. Lovink was informed of this decision on 24 April. See conversation between him and Casey on the same day in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 37, NAA.
46 Memorandum by McCarthy, 9 July 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 38, NAA.
The Dutch proved eager to test such high-sounding rhetoric, and raised the contentious question of staff talks – as a means “of preparation for any move by Indonesia”. Menzies used the method applied earlier with Lovink, saying that “of course the position of the United States in any military exchanges or discussions on preparatory military measures was highly important”. He also implied that the Americans would have to be involved in such talks, and noted that the circumstances in which they would be willing to do so were not clear. In a later conversation between Menzies and Casey, which took account of the talks with de Quay and van Tuyll, as well as a meeting soon afterward with Luns, Menzies claimed the Dutch “realised that Australia could not give an undertaking in advance about military aid to help deal with any future prospective Indonesian attempt at lodgement”. On the other hand, they had “made the point that it would not be practical politics to leave discussion (as to what Australian aid might be provided) until the Indonesian aggression...had actually happened.” Therefore, they had asked if discussions between Australian and Dutch service officers might take place on an informal basis in London. Menzies’ reply, which echoed those commonly given by the Americans throughout the decade, was that he would raise the subject with Defence on his return.

In giving up their quest for a formal guarantee from Australia, the Dutch were in essence recognizing the limitations of the bilateral relationship – limitations whose identification might have been hoped to ease tensions with Canberra to an extent, yet they were ones that made the Liberal mission of preventing an early withdrawal all the more difficult. The problem of the Dutch becoming more discouraged was probably in Menzies’ mind when he agreed “quickly” that “no opportunity should be lost” in advancing administrative cooperation in NG, and in his decision to make a stronger than expected press statement on departure. In the latter, perhaps feeling that he was going as far as possible given the paramount need to avoid antagonizing the Indonesians, Menizes said he had told de Quay that “Australia has completely supported the view that the sovereignty of West New Guinea belongs to the Netherlands and that it should not be challenged by force or threat”. Also, in talking of “our positive association” in New Guinea’s development – in which he claimed “we are both so materially and morally interested” – Menzies remarked that there was continuing agreement on the

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47 Against the alleged problem of US wariness, the Prime Minister attempted unconvincingly to portray Australian agreement to transit rights as a military exchange.
48 Casey to Tange, 21 July 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 38, NAA.
49 loc.cit.
50 Memorandum by McCarthy, 9 July 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 38, NAA.
51 Press communiqué by Menzies, 1 July 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 38, NAA.
need to pursue improvement on each side of the island “with the ultimate idea of bringing the indigenous populations to a state of self-government.”

Such grand ‘Menzian’ language was not able to bridge the gap created by the diverging interests of both countries, and over the following months the Netherlands-Australian relationship increasingly became one best described in terms of strained and limited cooperation. The Dutch maintained low-level pressure on the question of talks in London, and they were gently diverted pending Cabinet consideration, but, in an atmosphere less characterized by the threat of immediate force, the main sign of tautness arose over plans vis-à-vis the political future of NG. The Dutch were keen to draw the Australians into tying the independence program of eastern New Guinea (ENG) more closely to that of the clearly accelerating one in WNG, thereby furthering the chance of union within an abbreviated time. Here, a concerted effort was made to impress on the Australians to need for speed and coordination. Luns, for example, urged Casey that the Australians

push on as fast and vigorously as possible with administrative co-operation in New Guinea between Australia and the Netherlands....it was Australia which had to set the pace in this, but...we might move more quickly.

The campaign reached a climax-ofsorts in November. In a letter from Lovink to Menzies, the Netherlands Government formally proposed creation of a confidential Dutch-Australian memorandum in which directives aimed “to widen” cooperation would be established for the administrative conference planned for March 1960. Notice was also served that Luns would give a statement to the Netherlands Parliament that cooperation with Australia implied that “consideration be given to the possibility...that the atochthones of both parts of New Guinea...might declare themselves in favour of constituting a political entity for the entire island.” A

52 See, for example, cablegram 187 from McCarthy, 8 October 1959, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 39, NAA.
53 See cablegram 175 for McCarthy, 3 November 1959, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 39, NAA.
54 A JIC assessment of August had confirmed earlier feeling that Indonesia would not attack in the near future. Although it was noted that “we cannot exclude the possibility that the Indonesians might resort to military action” (and it was thought that if they did, they would probably try to secure a lodgement, and follow it with moves in the UN), it was believed that “during the period under review [August 1959 to December 1960] the Indonesians will continue to concentrate on non-military tactics, coupled with minor infiltrations and other harassments, and will rely on these and other international and domestic pressures to hasten the erosion of the Dutch position”. See JIC (59) 46, “Likelihood of an Indonesian Attack Against Netherlands New Guinea Up to the End of 1960, and its Probable Form and Scale”.
55 See paragraph 1 of the DEA memorandum on Lovink’s letter to Menzies (of 9 November, 23 November 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
56 Cablegram 770 from Casey to G. Barwick (Acting Australian Minister for External Affairs) and Tange, 22 September 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
57 Lovink to Menzies, 9 November 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
subsequent letter was even bolder. It contained, in the first place, a draft joint memorandum on cooperation which announced the desire of both governments to “create a favourable atmosphere” for the possibility that the inhabitants of East and West New Guinea “will declare themselves in favour of a political unity comprising the entire island of New Guinea.” This, and the hastening of “the process of emancipation”, would be achieved by various integrated management policies – such as moves to “synchronize the rate of education” – along with “frequent consultations” between the Netherlands and Australia. As unconvincingly as certain of Menzies’ comments at The Hague, the letter added that it was of course “beyond question” that the Papuans had the last say in their future, and implied that it was possible to avoid the “the impression that a certain choice is being imposed.” The explanation that went with this memorandum was more ambitious again. Lovink said that the objective of the Netherlands and Australian governments would be best supported by “a common foreign policy” derived from two principles (to which the Australians were urged to adhere): solidarity in promoting international understanding of policies in NG, and a common commitment to obtaining “international support in order to safeguard the inviolability of the entire island”.

By coincidence, Casey gave his answer to Lovink’s first letter at the same time he was told of the contents of the second. Nevertheless, this response demonstrated that the Australian Cabinet was determined to continue resisting fixed obligations to the Dutch. In a written note, Casey said he and Menzies had considered Luns’ proposed statement, and thought reference to “consideration at this stage of the eventual political status of the two territories would appear to prejudice, and, in any event, to indicate an assumption about, the eventual choice of the indigenous inhabitants” – which could in turn be pilloried as inconsistent with self-determination. (It is ironic that having used self-determination to support the Dutch case in the international sphere, the Australians were now using the principle to resist Netherlands entreaties). The Australians were predictably more comfortable with the relatively innocuous arrangements of the past, saying the joint statement of 1957 was “an adequate framework for[,] and explanation of[,] future co-operation.” They therefore did not want Luns to say anything that might be construed as indicating Australia’s policy had gone beyond this communique. On the big issue of broadening cooperation in WNG, Menzies and Casey gave nothing away, noting that exchanges of information between administrations on the island were

58 Lovink to Casey, with attached draft memorandum, 27 November 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
59 Conversation between Casey and Lovink, 27 November 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
already sufficient, but that the “larger question” of NG’s future status was better discussed, if necessary, between the Dutch and Australian Governments.

In spite of a further message to the Dutch intended to soften the blow, Netherlands officials expressed distress at the Australian attitude. Lovink told Tange that Casey’s letter “had given the impression that Australia was turning the clock back”, and in a letter delivered by Lovink, Luns conveyed that while he would now avoid reference in parliament to union in NG, he was “surprised and disturbed” that Casey thought such a statement undesirable, and was “concerned about the significance which should be attached to certain reservations” in his letter of 27 November. Though acquainted with Luns’ fondness for melodrama, it was not difficult for the Australians to see that the problem of satisfying the Dutch within the context of an ‘Indocentric’ policy had reached new levels of acuity.

V

It is perhaps symbolic of the guiding principles of Australian policy – if unintentionally so – that Menzies visited Indonesia at the very moment of increased Dutch-Australian angst. In one sense, the Prime Minister’s visit was, as has been suggested, simply part of a general attempt to improve Australian-Indonesian relations. Certainly, the bulk of his tour involved insubstantial public relations exercises such as an address to students at Gajah Mada University, and a meeting with the Sultan of Djogakarta’s deputy. However, his journey to the Republic was, of course, much more than a routine attempt to stimulate cordiality in spite of differences over WNG; it was a move consistent with Cabinet’s decision that Indonesia be given greater significance, and particularly that WNG policy be somewhat modified as a result. Indeed, it is no coincidence that Menzies, who had no natural affinity with the Asian climate or its people, had never set foot on Indonesian soil before 1959.

There were two particular factors foremost in Menzies’ mind as he approached a private meeting with Sukarno. The first was that Australian-Indonesian relations had deteriorated after Subandrio’s visit in the same way that they had been suffering before the visit. In early August, the Indonesians – already extra-sensitive following Menzies’

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60 Cablegram 194 from Casey to McCarthy, 30 November 1959, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 9, NAA.
61 See copy of Tange to Casey, 4 December 1959, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 9, NAA.
62 Lovink to Casey, 4 December 1959, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 9, NAA.
63 See Mackie, op. cit., p. 309.
64 McIntyre to Tange, 7 December 1959, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 39, NAA.
visit to The Hague – had reacted strongly to a reported comment by the Prime Minister that “he hoped [that]...one day the whole of New Guinea would have self-government”, and that Australian policy was to “promote the welfare of the native people” supervened by “self government [sic]”. Subandrio had summoned McIntyre, telling him that the statement would be interpreted in Indonesia as Australian “expansionism” and “a new and considered policy of working actively...for the independent union of the two halves of New Guinea.” He also said Indonesia had never adversely remarked on the Australian administration of ENG, “but this could change if emotions were aroused.” At a press conference soon afterward, the Foreign Minister had noted that “the most important condition to Indonesia for...friendly relations was that Australia should refrain from conducting an active concept with regard to Indonesian territory”. Adding further fuel to the fire, and in what raised hackles in Australia, he “predicted that within five to ten years Asian Nations [sic] with their overcrowded populations might want to seek room to live and their eyes would be focussed on Australia” – especially if NG were united under its tutelage. Later, and reinforcing the damage done to Australian-Indonesian relations since February, Sukarno asked McIntyre “why we...have to spoil the effect of the [Casey-Subandrio statement] by making a point of insisting ever since that we support Netherlands sovereignty?” The President also hinted that he thought Dutch intransigence was rooted in the Australian position.

A second factor occupying Menzies’ thoughts was that the events of Subandrio’s visit had created precedents less difficult to defend a second time around. This assessment, combined with a degenerating bilateral relationship, convinced Menzies to follow similar tactics to those used with Subandrio. Australia could reiterate a technically-styled concession, which might convince the Indonesians that preference, domestic considerations, and legal issues prevented a change in policy, but constituted a reasonable attitude not based on a domineering anti-Indonesian outlook. Meanwhile, against the background of the joint statement and the parliamentary speeches of February, Indonesia, the Dutch, and the Australian public would be less likely to

55 After Menzies’ talks with the Dutch, Subandrio reportedly said that “Indonesia’s relations with Australia were not at present cordial.” See A. T. Griffith (Officer, Prime Minister’s Department) to Timbs, undated, A1209/54, 59/57, Pt 2, NAA.
56 This was a reasonably accurate rendition of what Menzies said. See p. 2, Griffith to Timbs, undated, A1209/54, 59/57, Pt 2, NAA.
57 Cablegram 390 from McIntyre, 4 August 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 38, NAA.
58 Cablegram 391 from Jakarta, 4 August 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 38, NAA.
59 See conversation between Helmi and Heydon (at this point, First Assistant Secretary, United Nations Division, DEA), 6 August 1959, in A1838/283, 3036/6/1, Pt 38, NAA.
60 McIntyre to Tange, 2 November 1959, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 39, NAA.
interpret the move as a change – or indicative of a new bias. The statements of support for the Dutch since then would also help in this regard.\textsuperscript{71}

In his main discussion with Sukarno on 6 December, and after the President had again alluded to confusion over why Australia supported the Dutch, Menzies used language almost identical to that employed in the first Cabinet meeting with Subandrio. He confirmed that “Australia was not a party principal in the matter”, and added

\begin{quote}{quote}
As... said to Subandrio in Australia, and as the joint statement issued in February made clear, if the Netherlands and Indonesia made an agreement over the future disposition of the territory, freely negotiated under no threat of force, Australia would respect it.”\textsuperscript{72}
\end{quote}

Having completed the unpleasant task of trying to convince Sukarno of Australia’s \textit{bona fide} respect for Indonesia, and the fairness of Canberra’s outlook on WNG, Menzies used the genial atmosphere created by the concession to increase surreptitiously the chances of making the concession meaningless. The Prime Minister knew the Dutch would not negotiate unless threatened by (or suffering) definite invasion, so he endeavoured to build another hindrance to this option for Sukarno. Menzies pointedly remarked that Australia was pleased to have Subandrio’s denial that Indonesia would resort to violence. Sukarno, keen to respond to Menzies’ attempts to be moderate, said “there was no question of any use of force” and that he would “underline Subandrio’s declaration three times”.

In the remainder of the conversation Menzies raised issues illustrative of the interest of Australians in New Guinea, and one critical of Indonesia’s claim as colonial, but he was careful to represent these as general views, rather than specifically those of the Australian Government. This was useful in terms of the need to tell the Australian and Dutch press that he had made ‘Australian’ interests clear to Sukarno. It was also a means of reinforcing the basic idea that Cabinet’s policy of support for Dutch sovereignty over WNG was, if disappointing, neither incomprehensible or changeable; Australians had a deep attachment to NG, and some found Indonesia’s claim to be thin, but this, and Government’s empathy at points, and its inability to ignore general Australian sentiment, was at least understandable. Finishing in a manner complementary to this, Menzies asserted that “whatever differences might remain – and it was only natural and proper that there should be some differences of view – genuine

\textsuperscript{71} The military risk associated with Indonesia detecting a more provisionary policy (that is, emboldenment) was seemingly also reduced by the current effectiveness of deterrence.

\textsuperscript{72} For an account of this discussion (6 December 1959) see appendix to McIntyre to Tange, 7 December 1959, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 39, NAA.

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friendship and understanding could be fostered from the far more numerous points of agreement."

Sukarno had heard this notion on many occasions, and he was not enamoured with it; he "sounded sceptical" according to the record, and returned "to the point that there could be no real improvement in relations until the West New Guinea issue was settled and out of the way." In other words, any reinforcement of the Dutch case, regardless of motive, and in spite of the usefulness of Australia's commitment to remain on the side-lines, was not sufficient to erase Indonesian resentment. This was a reminder to the Australians, as was Dutch disgruntlement, that the idea of holding to a diluted conventional policy on WNG (as a manifestation of the decision to make Indonesia more important, without writing-off NNG) was, practically speaking, exceptionally difficult – though there is no evidence at this point that it was thought impossible.

VI

A notable feature of the 5 January decision on the relative significance of Indonesia and WNG had been that, in spite of its obvious long-term importance to WNG policy, it was not accompanied by approval of specific long-term plans. It is true that hopes for a gradual transition to self-determination were implicit in continued, if more tentative, support for Dutch sovereignty, but this was not officially articulated, nor were carefully thought-out alternatives put forward.

This began to change after Subandrio's visit. On 24 February, Casey suggested to Menzies that "some thinking should be done" on stimulating cooperative activities with the Dutch, and "on future policy so far as the whole island of New Guinea is concerned." Menzies agreed, and proposed that a group of officers from the Department of Territories (DT) and External Affairs "get together". Casey subsequently wrote to Paul Hasluck (Australian Minister for Territories) that "it would be desirable...to study what Australian objectives should be if the Netherlands should...modify their claim to unilateral sovereignty", and asked for a DT officer to participate in a DEA working group under the supervision of an Assistant Secretary. Hasluck, in turn, instructed C. R. Lambert (Secretary, DT) to cooperate in such a study.

73 Casey to Tange, 24 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
74 Casey to P. Hasluck (Australian Minister for Territories), erroneously dated 15 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA. Territories' task in this context was to determine whether, why, and how Australian interests and obligations in ENG would be affected by the type of government in WNG. See Tange to C. R. Lambert (Secretary, DT), 14 May 1959, in the same file.
75 Hasluck to Casey, 25 February 1959, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
After some wrangling, and a number of months, a draft joint Cabinet submission was produced. The fundamental idea in the paper was that Australia could, and should, keep the Dutch in, and the Indonesians out, for long enough to bring both sides of New Guinea to self-determination. This position was based on a number of convictions. Firstly, the Dutch were capable of bringing about “a degree of self-government” in a “relatively short period” if Australia cooperated with them, and if the US and UK supported their presence. (It was no coincidence that Dutch pressure for invigoration of the 1957 administrative agreement was raised here, and identified as needing Cabinet direction). Secondly, the negative possibilities associated with WNG emerging earlier than ENG could be overcome; “the problems attending...political coordination between West and East New Guinea...would not seem insurmountable so long as full advantage can be taken of the time available...in which the necessary adjustments can be made”. Thirdly, deterrence was currently effective, but even if it failed later, the US and UK might be induced to “intervene effectively”. Fourthly, it was thought that although Cabinet had decided Indonesia was more important than WNG, and that “it should be a major objective to keep Indonesia non-Communist and friendly”, “it does not follow that the relinquishment of Netherlands New Guinea to Indonesia...would be attained or even materially assisted”. This was because the forces capable of bringing Indonesia under communist rule were “essentially internal and not external”; there was – and this contradicted common American argument – “no reason to believe that the existence of the West Irian issue has decisively influenced the growth of Communist influence in the past”. In terms of Australian-Indonesian relations, the surrendering of WNG was predicted as providing short-term benefit, but one that could not be guaranteed in the long-run owing to potential for disagreement on other issues. Furthermore, the odds of a growing Indonesian influence in ENG, demands for “liberation” of that territory, or “inter-territorial” hostility between either side of the island, could not be discounted. The extension of communist and Asian influence into ENG and Melanesia was also a factor.

The exact recommendations of the paper were that Australia, keeping in mind the exclusion of Indonesia and the retention of a Dutch presence, should “envisage, facilitate and encourage ultimate voluntary political association of the East and West New Guinea people” and support the Dutch in the UN. In this, Australia should do

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76 See Heydon to Tange, 30 July 1959, Hasluck to Barwick, 24 March 1959, and undated note by Tange, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 8, NAA.
77 See attachment to Heydon to Lambert, 18 December 1959, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 9, NAA.
everything possible “to reduce damage to our relations with Indonesia” (yet it was conceded that the amount of damage involved had not been considered in the paper). Regarding the Dutch, the Commonwealth Government should discuss political objectives and the issue of coordination with the Netherlands Government, widen exchanges of information at the administrative level, and perhaps provide technical and financial aid for WNG. Necessary too was encouragement of US and UK backing for Dutch administration, their “full participation in the maintenance of effective deterrents…and their full acceptance of the view that, if…aggression occurs, it must be thwarted.” In the aforementioned situation, Australia had to play its part, probably providing logistic reinforcement, and perhaps military forces. Faced with a Dutch withdrawal before self-government in WNG – which was admitted to be an “extremely difficult situation” – Australia had to try to gain “a maximum voice” in the territory’s administration and “keep open” the possibility of Papuan unification. If the Dutch offered to give WNG to Australia (transfer to the UN and Indonesia had earlier been judged unlikely), attempts should be made to negotiate a trusteeship treaty with the UN.

In a general sense, the paper represented a further development of ideas surrounding a Papuan nation that had been displayed in the DEA since 1957. At one level, then, there was much in the Department’s latest efforts that was already familiar – if not in a detailed manner – to members of the policy-making circle. The other aspect was that the submission broke new ground in certain areas. The main change was that it contained, for the first time, immediate recommendations for Cabinet on the exact moves deemed necessary to bring about an association between the two territories. Previously, approaches to Cabinet had been characterized by ideas such as continued low-powered administrative contact (against the background of undefined forms of self-determination), and studies on the efficacy of trusteeship.

Against the background of the Government policy since January 1959, Tange and his colleagues must have had some awareness that they would encounter difficulties securing Cabinet agreement. This was tempered to an extent by encouraging feedback received in the lead-up to Ministerial consideration. Casey, for his part, and in spite of his support throughout the year for Cabinet’s new line, endorsed the paper as “a very good piece of work.” 78 It was well known in the Department that the backing of other Ministers was hardly thereby certain, but Casey’s acquiescence was obviously necessary to at least get the submission into Cabinet. The DEA may have been more excited by the assistance of Lambert who, after reading the second draft, declared it to be

78 Teletype message from Casey to Tange, 29 December 1959, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 9, NAA.
“acceptable to me” (although he said he assumed Casey would clear it with Hasluck before submission to Cabinet).\textsuperscript{79} With Lambert “on side”, it was probably thought that the chances of attaining Hasluck’s vote had increased, and he, moreover, had a higher standing in Cabinet than Casey did.

The promising flow of events had, a few days earlier, been given further force by the Defence Committee’s approval of a JPC report on the military significance of WNG for Australia.\textsuperscript{80} The JPC assessment laid down, if not as strongly as earlier in the decade, Defence’s position that WNG was strategically important to Australian defence. In essence, it predicted that something of a domino-effect could result from an Indonesian presence in WNG, whereby the security of the Australia proper could become increasingly threatened. The DC summary of the JPC report made clear that the retention of WNG in “friendly hands...ensures the security of ENG”. Put otherwise, and as contained in the general conclusions at the end of the DC report, the occupation of WNG by a hostile Indonesia “would present a grave strategic threat to Australia” because it would “seriously prejudice the security of ENG and threaten Australia’s outer defences.”\textsuperscript{81}

The first bad news received in the DEA was that Hasluck, who had apparently not been particularly involved in liaising with External Affairs over the paper, was unprepared to follow Lambert’s lead. In reply to a letter by Casey – sent as a cover note to the DEA submission – he said that

> We should distinguish between...The situation affecting our relations with the Netherlands and Indonesia and the nature of the support we can give the Dutch in West New Guinea, and...The long-term question of Australian interests in the future of the Australian Territory of Papua and New Guinea.\textsuperscript{82}

It was his opinion that the WNG problem could be influenced by Australian policy in ENG, but he believed it should not be the other way around. To be sure, DEA proposals for close coordination with the Dutch would upset the tight control that Hasluck wanted Australia to exert over the timing of PNG independence. Continuing, he wrote of the “desirability of regarding all the people of...New Guinea as having a common future”,

\textsuperscript{79} Lambert to Heydon, 21 December 1959, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 9, NAA. The draft read by Lambert did not include the recommendations cited above. See loc.cit.

\textsuperscript{80} For both the Defence Committee assessment (17 December 1959) and the JPC report (20 November 1959) see A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 9, NAA.

\textsuperscript{81} For the first time, assessment of WNG’s strategic importance contained reference to the possible impact of inter-continental ballistic missiles and nuclear war on the territory’s significance. It was implied that control of WNG might mean less if missiles could be launched on Australia from Asia or by submarines. However, in the case of war, and super-power exhaustion, or the inability of allies to come to Australia’s aid, “the depth of defence provided by New Guinea would be of prime importance.”

\textsuperscript{82} Hasluck to Casey, 11 January 1960, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 9, NAA.
yet he questioned the “practicality of reaching this unity.” A better move, it was thought, might be to bring about a unification of the British Solomon Islands with WNG. In conclusion, he commented that he had “consistently” held that the Dutch should be fully supported in WNG, and that Australia would be best off if the Netherlands retained sovereignty for some time, yet he felt concurrently that “we should not allow the importunity of the Dutch to bustle us into doing something in West New Guinea, or entering into commitments regarding its future, before we are ourselves ready to do so.” Later, Hasluck said to Casey that the submission was essentially a foreign relations matter, and that he would not oppose its being brought before Cabinet.\(^85\) Nevertheless, as Hamilton pointed out, “Hasluck had not committed himself to support the submission in Cabinet” – and indeed there was little hope that he would.

P. R. Heydon (First Assistant Secretary, United Nations Division, DEA) criticized almost every part of Hasluck’s note,\(^84\) and Casey was similarly negative about the response of the Minister for Territories,\(^85\) but the anxieties engendered by Hasluck’s opposition were soon countered by the apparent attainment of the most critical factor in the passing of almost any submission in Canberra: Menzies’ support.\(^86\) In early February 1960, the Prime Minister, who had just appointed himself Minister for External Affairs, was given a draft submission, and shown Hasluck’s views – along with the DEA reaction.\(^87\) He replied that he was “in general agreement with the substance”,\(^88\) and proposed to have it “stand as Mr Casey’s paper, though submitted to Cabinet by me.”

This was a rather odd response from someone who had not only been the prime-mover behind changes in Australian policy during early 1959, but who was actively involved – as late as his December visit to Sukarno – in their implementation. Menzies had been attracted to the notion of Papuan unification, yet only in so far as it could be achieved without endangering objectives in Indonesia. It soon became evident that he had read the memorandum only briefly, failing to grasp the full implications of the DEA position. M. C. Timbs of the Prime Minister’s Department (Assistant Secretary, Cabinet Division) made clear to Menzies that the DEA and Defence papers ignored the 5

\(^{83}\) Note by Hamilton, 26 January 1960, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 9, NAA.

\(^{84}\) Heydon to Tange, 19 January 1960, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 9, NAA.

\(^{85}\) See note by Heydon, 22 January 1960, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 9, NAA.


\(^{87}\) See Tange to Menzies, 8 February 1960, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 9, NAA. Having received a life peerage, Casey retired from active political life. For comment on Menzies’ self-appointment, see Edwards, op.cit., p. 208.

\(^{88}\) Tange to Menzies, 8 February 1960, in A1838/283, TS3036/6/1, Pt 9, NAA.
January decision, and warned that a return to previous policy “might produce the very ingredient which would justify a wholly anti-Western position by Indonesia and enhance the prospect of a communist takeover.”

Menzies appears to have consequently retracted his support for the submission. Certainly, this seems implicit in the reaction of Cabinet to the agenda, which involved an absolute rejection of the ideas of Casey and the DEA, and a resounding reaffirmation of support for the policy embarked upon just prior to Subandrio’s visit. At the beginning of the meeting, and before the paper was considered, Cabinet made clear that its radical decisions of 5 January 1959 remained the basis of Australian policy:

The Cabinet referred...to its discussion and decision on 5 January, 1959, and to public statements since made. In particular, it recalled...that the strategic importance of Indonesia is of greater significance to the United States and to Australia than Netherlands New Guinea. It was also acknowledged that Australia was “not involved in the Netherlands New Guinea matter as a party principal, and would recognise an agreement between Indonesia and the Netherlands affecting sovereignty provided it were freely entered into.” These choices, which reversed the relative importance of WNG and Indonesia, had been accompanied by the attempt to nevertheless continue supporting a Dutch presence. Cabinet, by recalling the decision to pursue deterrence, and statements showing that Australia “recognises the principle of self-determination”, demonstrated that it thought this line, in spite of the problems that had accompanied it, had been successful.

The DEA memorandum stood little chance within such an atmosphere. Not only was the idea of a change in tactics foreign – aside from the exact form that any real changes by Cabinet might take (which would be likely to be more pro-Indonesian if policy had failed) – the agenda was at root guided by the very principles that Cabinet had rejected 14 months before. Thus, when Cabinet discussed the matter, it concluded “that the decision of 5 January, 1959, and the views underlying it, still stand, and that no new decision is necessary”; Cabinet had “therefore not approved or endorsed any particular recommendations”. Rather, and consistent with minimal-risk support of the Dutch, the 1957 Agreement was to “continue to be regarded as the basis for cooperation between the Australian and Netherlands territories.” Capping off what was a

89 Timbs’ memorandum is cited in Phelps, op.cit., pp. 325-26. Its file number is not recorded.
90 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 2 March 1960, in A4943, Volume 2, NAA. For the DEA paper see Submission No. 550 in A5818/2, Vol. 13, NAA.
91 The limitations of Australian support for the Netherlands were also evident in the decision that “considerable caution needs to be observed in making answers to Dutch requests or proposals, and that, as far as practicable, responses should be oral and not written.”
disaster for the DEA, the Defence Committee’s effectively pro-Dutch findings on the military importance of WNG were not even discussed.\textsuperscript{92}

From a Cabinet perspective, the results of the 3 March meeting amounted to the second time in little over a year that the executive had ignored both advisors and public opinion. In fact, the most notable facet of Government policy in the period following Subandrio’s visit and leading into the new year had been Cabinet’s determination, in the face of great difficulties, to continue with the charter of January 1959 – that is, placing Indonesia above WNG without letting go of WNG altogether.

\textsuperscript{92} For the Defence Committee report – along with Hasluck’s work on the “Unity of New Guinea” – see submissions 551 and 554 in A5818/2, Vol. 13, NAA. Hasluck’s report, which detailed the idea that NG and islands surrounding it were suited to union, and that Cabinet work towards this by trying to incorporate the Solomon Islands first (and perhaps WNG later), was considered by the Ministers to be irrelevant. (For Hasluck’s retrospective account of the relationship between Australian activities in ENG and those of the Dutch in WNG, see A Time for Building: Australian Administration in Papua and New Guinea 1951-1963, Melbourne, 1976, pp. 359-73).
Chapter 9: Reversion to a Hard-Line WNG Policy, January 1960-February 1961

I

Nineteen-sixty was not a year that repaid Cabinet hopes for an environment conducive to the policy of ‘controlled bias’. It was a complex and unstable period in terms of the WNG dispute, and one that promoted change in the capitals of interested powers. On the international front, it was a year of growth for many of the direct causes of Dutch capitulation in 1961-62. This phenomenon was sparked by a Netherlands decision to push much faster towards Papuan self-determination and, particularly, by concurrent Dutch anxiety to reinforce the NNG garrison. The Indonesians seized on the move, and seemingly proceeded to drive the dispute towards a violent climax – a trend which in turn stimulated the beginning of policy re-evaluation in Washington and London. In Canberra, these crises would predictably have drawn the Government closer to accepting an Indonesian takeover, but this was not to be; a reassessment of the dynamics of Indonesian communism, and bilateral relations resulted in a surprisingly pro-Dutch outcome.

Early in the year, the Liberal Government was certainly not prepared to unequivocally exhibit a pro-Dutch mood. In the period just prior to Cabinet consideration of the DEA submission, it had made abundantly clear to the Dutch that the Australian Government was not keen to become actively involved in either Dutch plans for rapid political development in WNG or Papuan unification. This was particularly so in relation to the administrative conference scheduled for early March. Following Casey’s talk with Lovink on 27 November 1959, during which the Ambassador was informed that the Australian Government did not want larger political questions discussed at an administrative level,¹ close scrutiny was paid to any Dutch moves that could turn the Hollandia Conference on Administrative Co-Operation into a means of discussing larger political issues.² Despite an unofficial visit to Australia in mid-February by T. H. Bot (the new Netherlands Secretary of State for NG), during which he alluded provocatively to the significance of cooperation on the island,³ the

¹ Describing the secret meeting at which this decision was made, Hasluck wrote to Lambert that “the Department [of Territories] and the Administrator of Papua and New Guinea should clearly understand that these administrative conferences are to be kept solely to the administrative level and are not to discuss matters other than those which are customarily dealt with at the administrative level.” Hasluck to Lambert, 23 November 1959, in A1838/280, 3036/10/3, Pt 7, NAA.
² See Lambert to D. M. Cleland (Administrator, Papua and New Guinea), 25 January 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/10/3, Pt 7, NAA.
³ On 16 February 1960, The Canberra Times reported T. H. Bot (Netherlands Secretary of State for NG) as saying he had had “informative” discussions with Menzies and Hasluck, that he “believed the wisest course would be for [the West Papuans] to join with the natives of Australian Papua-New Guinea”, and
Australians were apparently successful in limiting the conference to managerial problems.¹

The basic message was reiterated, not surprisingly, after the Cabinet meeting of 2 March. On the 15th, Menzies spoke to Lovink, ostensibly as a means of answering the Ambassador’s letters of November. He told Lovink that cooperation between the two countries “should take place naturally and without fuss and on actual tasks being carried out in the Territories”, and that the 1957 joint statement and Memorandum of Agreement were an “adequate basis” for such cooperation.² As a sop to inevitable Dutch disgruntlement, Menzies then focussed on deterrence, saying that Australian and Netherlands attempts to make the US and UK aware of the need to prevent an attack – and Indonesia cognizant of the futility of doing so – appeared “to have had considerable effect.” Therefore, Australia thought “the programme of diplomatic activity needs to be continuous and has decided to maintain it.”

Lovink “expressed himself as disappointed”, but went on to say that he was soon returning to The Hague, and would propose that the Dutch, in presenting their case to Asian nations, stop talking about legal issues surrounding the WNG question, and emphasize that transfer to Indonesia would deny Papuans that same rights that Asians now enjoyed. This reaction was an early sign of a new trend in Dutch circles; the desire to rapidly rid themselves of WNG, and find novel methods of doing so, regardless of the state of Australian policy. Dutch eagerness in this direction was soon to transform the atmosphere of a dispute which had, since the tense days of late 1957 to early 1959, become relatively quiescent.

A month after the Hollandia Conference, the Netherlands Government announced new plans for the future of West New Guinea. In a Second Chamber address, Bot indicated that a scheme for a legislative council in WNG – consisting of elected and selected indigenous representatives – was to be put in motion.³ He also suggested that his Government would increase sharply the pace at which WNG was driven towards independence. The objective of this was to accelerate movement towards self-determination, whilst attempting to prepare a foundation for its

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¹ That he “welcomed the increasing economic and administrative co-operation between the Dutch and Australian authorities.” See article in A1838/280, 3036/10/3, Pt 7, NAA.

² See the press release at the end of the conference in savingram 20 to New York, 11 March 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/10/3, Pt 8, NAA.

³ In a memorandum for the DEA (15 March 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA), Menzies explained that in conversing with Lovink, he used notes provided by Heydon (as quoted). See attachment to Heydon to Lovink, 16 March 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.

⁴ For an account of Bot’s speech, 5 April 1960, see attachment to memorandum by H. W. Bullock (Counsellor, Australian Embassy, The Hague), 14 April 1960, A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.
international acceptance, particularly within the Third World. Although sentiment in favour of denying the territory to Indonesia was still strong in the Netherlands, support for the notion of hastening the process towards a severing of the connection between WNG and the ‘Motherland’, previously the domain of the Socialists, was now bipartisan. ⁷

There were a number of reasons for the wave of support for what would obviously be premature independence for DNG. From the perspective of the de Quay Government, as J. van Beuge (Deputy Director, New Guinea Division, Netherlands Ministry of Home Affairs) remarked, the reality of the international movement for an increase in the tempo of decolonization had to be faced. ⁸ This was true enough, as was the incentive to be rid of both a drain on the Netherlands economy and an area that had nothing to do with the European focus of Dutch foreign policy, but there were more specific motives as well. The most important of these was that Dutch believed Australia, along with the United States and Britain, was not prepared to afford the diplomatic and military protection necessary to a carefully graduated process towards self-determination. The chances were that an isolated Netherlands administration overseeing a slow-moving program would eventually suffer invasion in WNG or defeat in the UN, or both. It made sense, then, to try to establish an international bulwark against these contingencies that was separate to the traditional one provided by white allies. The establishment of a credible Papuan voice, around which the developing nations would rally, was considered a (perhaps the only) possibility within this context.

A problem for the Dutch was that they were still vulnerable in the period before they could expect to build this international body of opinion. This was especially the case in terms of Indonesian aggression, for Netherlands officials appeared to believe Bot’s speech, at least in 1960, would help them defeat an Indonesian action in the UN. ⁹

Anxiety over a physical threat explains why the elucidation of Bot’s address was paralleled by the declaration that the aircraft carrier *Karel Doorman* would make a trip to NNG in order to “show the flag”, ¹⁰ and would strengthen the defences of the territory

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⁷ See comments of J. van Beuge (Deputy Director, New Guinea Division, Netherlands Ministry of Home Affairs), in his conversation with Bullock, 11 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.

⁸ *loc. cit.* Van Beuge declared that “the Dutch would not be able to hang on any longer than 10 years. In fact, he was inclined to doubt whether they had that long. They must take whatever steps seem practicable to speed up the whole process. He would not be prepared to say that the inhabitants of New Guinea would be ready for self-rule within 10 years. But pressures were likely to build up which could mean that they would have self-rule in about that time whether they were ready or not.”

⁹ *loc. cit.*

¹⁰ See memorandum on Netherlands, Indonesian, and Australian statements on the defence of WNG, 25 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.
at the same time. The Dutch wanted not only to prepare for a medium-term threat, but, similar to a year before, meet any immediate danger. In mid-March, Isinger had told F. J. Blakeney (head, South and SEA Branch, DEA) that since having to abort an invasion scheduled for March 1959, the Indonesians had “changed their tactics”, and he handed over a report detailing an alleged “plan for aggression” against WNG. This plan, which the Netherlands claimed had already been implemented, consisted of four phases. In the first, the Indonesians would gather intelligence on centres of potential resistance amongst the indigenous population of DNG, whilst in the second these centres would be activated – though not in the form of positive insurrection. The forces needed for these two stages would be infiltrated from Indonesia. In the third phase, rebellion, guerilla warfare, and the establishment of a rebel government would occur, to be followed, finally, by a diplomatic – and possibly military – offensive. Within this context, it was thought that “the Indonesian Government have issued instructions to provoke an incident with the Netherlands Forces” and that they had realized “that it would suffice to undertake military action of a character that inevitably would lead to the internationalization of the dispute.”

Whether or not such an Indonesian strategem existed, there can be no doubt that the Karel Doorman decision set in motion a chain reaction that eventually had an impact on the complexion of the dispute as a whole. The first effect was that the Indonesians, who were initially caught “flat-footed” (as R. N. Hamilton, an officer of the DEA’s SEA Section noted), reacted vehemently. The new Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, Patrick Shaw, was asked to tell Canberra that the Indonesian Government

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11 See speech by E. H. Toxopeus (Netherlands Minister of Home Affairs), 5 April 1960, attached to memorandum by Bullock, 14 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA. The Dutch Charge d’affaires in Canberra later told F. J. Blakeney (head, South and SEA Branch, DEA) that reinforcements to the NNG garrison, the nature of which were revealed in more detail by the Netherlands Minister of Defence on 26 April, were “such as would be able to cope with a surprise attack”. See conversation between Isinger and Blakeney, 28 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.
12 Conversation between Isinger and Blakeney, 18 March 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.
13 See annex to letter from Isinger to Blakeney, 18 March 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.
14 The Dutch believed that a controversial earlier statement by Nasution, to the effect that Indonesia must be ready for “territorial war” in its fight for freedom from colonialism (see Hamilton to Cox (DT, position and initials unidentified), 29 March 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA), fitted “exactly into the pattern exposed in the paper.” See conversation between Isinger and Blakeney, 18 March 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.
15 The Dutch also gave the Australians a supplementary paper that referred to six alleged infiltrations by Indonesia since the beginning of 1959. See conversation between Isingner and Blakeney, 9 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA. The paper itself, dated 9 May 1960, can be found in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.
16 The Australians believed there was no hard evidence to support its existence, and yet were not prepared to rule out the possibility. See “Draft Comment on Dutch Assessment” by the Joint Planning Staff in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA, and cablegram 648 to Washington, 21 May 1960, in the same file.
17 Hamilton to Blakeney and B. C. Hill (Assistant Secretary, UN Branch, DEA), 20 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.
regarded the announcement to send the Doorman as a provocative act which raised tensions in a dispute that Indonesia hoped to resolve peacefully.\textsuperscript{18} Similarly, Helmi, told the Acting Minister for External Affairs, Sir Garfield Barwick, that the Dutch “were playing with fire”, and that “there was a real danger that some kind of an incident might occur.”\textsuperscript{19} Publicly, Subandrio said in Cairo that if the Dutch continued “with their provocative display of force in Indonesian waters, certainly Indonesia cannot remain idle”.\textsuperscript{20} Later, feeling over the matter was graphically symbolized by Sukarno’s announcement of the severance of diplomatic relations with the Dutch.\textsuperscript{21}

Indonesian fears were not entirely manufactured. In July, Shaw wrote that the decision had “caused genuine alarm here about the possibility of [an] incident leading to armed conflict”, and there is evidence to suggest some thought plans might be afoot to oversee infiltrations into East Indonesian territory in an attempt to destabilize the Republic.\textsuperscript{22} In essence, however, Indonesian rhetoric had more to do with propaganda than anything else. It was evident to all that a Dutch reconquista was out of the question, and that the international climate was in no way favourable to the threats by the Netherlands over WNG. In foreign policy terms, the real issue was that the Karel Doorman provided an ideal opportunity for the controlled intensification of the dispute, and for the nullification of the potentially damaging announcement of plans for a Papuan native council.\textsuperscript{23}

The struggle to ‘liberate’ Irian nearly always had an internal complexion as well. The Karel Doorman affair provided a useful tool for Sukarno at a time of great political tension in Jakarta. After failing to enact his scheme for ‘Guided Democracy’ through Parliament in mid-1959, Sukarno had opted for Presidential decree to bring it about, re-

\textsuperscript{18} Suwito (position unidentified) to Shaw, 9 April 1960, in a summary of Indonesian statements, 13 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.
\textsuperscript{19} Conversation between Barwick (Acting Minister for External Affairs) and Helmi, 16 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.
\textsuperscript{20} Untitled and anonymous memorandum containing statement by Subandrio in Cairo, 25 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.
\textsuperscript{21} Circular cablegram from Canberra, 24 August 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 42, NAA. Sukarno cited the “increasing stubborness” of the Dutch over WNG, and the Karel Doorman incident, as the reasons behind this action.
\textsuperscript{22} See R. W. L. Austin (Second Secretary, Australian Embassy, Jakarta) to Tange, 11 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA, and also memorandum on Netherlands, Indonesian, and Australian statements on the defence of WNG, 25 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.
\textsuperscript{23} An example of how the latter was attempted may be found in Ganis Harsono’s (Spokesman for the Indonesian Department of Foreign Affairs) comment (as paraphrased by Antara) that “Obviously what the Dutch wanted now is to still colonize West Irian territory for at least another 10 years...[and] they even intended to do it with the force of arms which they would flagrantly display by a “flag show” of their naval forces.” See Austin to Tange, 11 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.
establishing the 1945 Constitution, and dissolving the Constituent Assembly. Soon afterward, a new Cabinet, viewed positively by the US, was formed. Sukarno assumed the additional role of Premier, and for the first time, Nasution was given a political position as Minister for Defence. It was soon to emerge, however, that Sukarno was interested in sustaining (and perhaps increasing) the influence of the PKI as a counterweight to Nasution’s rising power. Between early and mid-1960, the Sukarno-Nasution relationship became tense to an unprecedented degree – as did that between the PKI and the Army – and there were some who believed a decisive showdown likely. In order to forestall an attack on himself or the PKI, Sukarno used the Karel Doorman issue “as one of [his] chief diversionary weapons”.

The Americans were bothered by the ramifications of the Doorman affair for both Indonesia’s domestic politics and the Republic’s policy on WNG. This concern, which was compounded during attempts to deal with the twin-pronged problem, was one of the most important indirect effects of the Dutch Government decision to send the Karel Doorman. It appears to have been central in convincing influential US policymakers that the WNG dispute was costing the US too much. As soon as the Netherlands announced its intentions, there had been unease in Washington as to the response it might evoke in Indonesia. Reflecting on expected internal outcomes, the US Charge d’affaires in Jakarta wrote: “[The] Army, anti-Sukarno parties, [and] other forces pressing for reversal [of] present Sukarno policies will be placed at a disadvantage in [the] closely balanced struggle by [the] long-standing personal identification [of] Sukarno with this highly emotional [WNG] issue....[The] Karel Doorman visit...could well tip the balance [in] his favour, and force opposition either [to] fall in weakly behind him or be branded pro-Dutch.” There were also fears that Indonesia’s official policy on WNG could become more extreme. The deputy head of the State Department’s Far Eastern Bureau stressed to his counterpart in European Affairs that it “seems clear...the Doorman visit could seriously undercut the efforts the

25 See Parsons to Dillon, 16 July 1959, in ibid., p. 413.
26 See Mein to J. M. Steeves (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Department), 29 March 1960, in ibid., p. 475.
27 The expression belongs to Ambassador Jones. See telegram from Jones to State, 31 August 1960, ibid., p. 529.
28 Phelps, op.cit., p. 330, challenges this idea, believing calls for a review of policy mid-year preceded the emergence of the Doorman affair. The Doorman had, however, been a live issue for a number of months by this time.
United States has been making to dampen Indonesian chauvinism with respect to the West New Guinea issue."\(^{30}\) In view of these burdens, the Americans tried to exert a moderating influence on both the Dutch and Indonesians.\(^{31}\) By the time the aircraft carrier had left SEA in September, and the worst of the furore had blown over, US officials probably judged that their efforts had been relatively successful, but this was not achieved without considerable exertion.\(^{32}\) Moreover, the Doorman had poignantly illustrated how intractable and dangerous the WNG dispute had become, and, particularly, how problems thrown up by it could continue to damage the prospects of their major ‘asset’, General Nasution. Given that US commitment to Nasution was increasing,\(^{33}\) these were serious concerns – and concerns that were soon to result in the first real review of US policy since the early 1950s.

The US was not alone among the international community in its growing fears, as stimulated by the Doorman issue, over the possible impact of the WNG dispute on national self-interest and objectives. Indeed, in 1960 the British appear to have become nervous over the more menacing atmosphere between Indonesia and the Dutch administration in Irian. In April, shortly after the announcement of the Doorman’s cruise, the British Ambassador to Indonesia, Sir Leslie Fry, commented to Shaw that there “was substantial British investment in Indonesia and the security interests of Britain in Singapore, Malaya and elsewhere in the Far East were far more important to the world than the Dutch interest in West New Guinea...he was recommending to his Government that Indonesia be taken up much more seriously and importantly.”\(^{34}\) This apprehension soon produced rumblings in London that pointed to possible policy reassessment. In July, thought was given to retracting promises of logistic support for the Dutch unless informed of decisions regarding WNG,\(^{35}\) and at the same time concern was expressed by a member of the Commonwealth Relations Office regarding the lack of knowledge in Whitehall of Australia’s long-term plans regarding Indonesia, the

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\(^{30}\) Parsons to F. D. Kohler (Assistant Secretary of State, European and Canadian Affairs), 15 April 1960, in ibid., p. 492.

\(^{31}\) See telegram from the State Department to US Embassy, Jakarta, 14 May 1960, in ibid., p. 490.

\(^{32}\) See, for example, telegram from Dillon to US Embassy, Jakarta, 14 May 1960, in ibid., p. 491-93.

\(^{33}\) On 29 September 1960, for example, General Abdul Haris Nasution (Indonesian Army Chief of Staff, and Indonesian Minister for Defence and People’s Security) was secretly promised US support in the event of “a crisis and a confrontation”: See telegram from State Department to US Embassy, Jakarta, 30 September 1960, in ibid., pp. 547-49.

\(^{34}\) Conversation between Sir Leslie Fry (British Ambassador to Indonesia) and Patrick Shaw (Australian Ambassador, Jakarta), 1 April 1960, in Shaw to Tange, 4 April 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA. Mid-year, the FO demonstrated its anxiety by revealing to the Australians that it planned to have talks about Indonesia policy with Australia and the US. See cablegram 2926 from London, 4 July 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.

\(^{35}\) Cablegram 2926 from London, 4 July 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.
Netherlands, and WNG. Perhaps exposing an assumption that the British were hoping, or beginning, to work by, the officer said that he felt that “if it came to the test, [Australia] would not in fact support the Dutch.” It would be incorrect to portray the British as on the verge of a break with the Dutch or the Australians – the former were too important to them in Europe and they wanted to maintain solidarity with the latter vis-à-vis WNG – but there were faint signs the UK might one day pressure both to capitulate. An important accompaniment to a new and more serious form of American and British anxiety was the emergence of a Third World emergency initiative aimed at solving what was perceived to have become a dangerous dispute. On 20 September the Malayan Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, commented to Sukarno that

It is foremost in my mind that this source of acrimony between Indonesia and Holland should be removed once and for all for the sake of world peace and particularly the stability of this region.

Believing that the Dutch would be prepared to hand the territory over to the UN, the Tunku proposed that Indonesia accept a UN Trusteeship for WNG, after which the UN could be persuaded to “accept as a term of the trusteeship system that West Irian be handed over to Indonesia after a suitable period of tutelage”. There was widespread agreement in Canberra that this was contrary to the Charter, though Menzies – seeing the potential repercussions of a metamorphosing international climate over WNG – asserted that Australia should be careful not to oppose mediation itself, or be irrevocably committed against trusteeship. Nevertheless, such considerations were not foremost in Australian minds. The immediate problem was that although Indonesia had previously received backing from the smaller nations both inside and outside the UN, there had never before been a relatively independent call for an immediate solution to the conflict. The attempts of the Tunku to mediate carried the threat of gathering an irrepressible wave of support from the newer countries as a move in defence of regional and global stability. In other words, the Tunku’s actions leant credibility to the growing

36 Conversation between A. J. Eastman (Assistant Secretary, Division 1, DEA) and H. A. Twist (Officer, South East and Far Eastern Department, British Commonwealth Relations Office), 4 July 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.
37 See loc.cit. for the importance of links with the Dutch and, for their concerns regarding the Australians, see cablegram 3950 from London, 7 September 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 42, NAA.
38 Tunku Abdul Rahman (Prime Minister of Malaya) to Sukarno, 20 September 1960, as an annex to T. K. Critchley (Australian High Commissioner to Malaya) to Tange, 22 September 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.
39 See W. T. Doig (Officer, United Nations Branch, DEA) to Harry, 27 September 1960, and Heydon to Harry, 28 September 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA. See also cablegram 1513 from Menzies to Beale, 31 October 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 11, NAA.
40 loc.cit.
feeling that the situation in Irian was out of control, and that something should be done about it.

II

Canberra’s response to the crises of early 1960 had been cautious. News of Dutch plans for a Legislative Council were not marked by declarations of enthusiasm, but neither were they condemned; the Menzies Government wanted to maximize the possibilities of establishing a new political system in WNG free from Indonesian control. On the other hand, it did not want to be too closely identified with the Netherlands position. No attempts were made to raise the issue of the council with the Indonesians, and interestingly the latter were similarly reticent to discuss the problem in an explicit manner. A similar wish to avoid unnecessary damage to Dutch confidence – without damaging links with Indonesia by appearing to have a “Siamese-Twin relationship” with the Dutch41 – was evident regarding the Karel Doorman. Representations were made to the Netherlands Government parallel to early ones made by the US,42 and presumably for the purpose of ensuring that the Dutch engage in no drastic action. Moderation of the Indonesian attitude – without appearing as “apologists for the Dutch”43 – was also sought,44 as there was a feeling an “inspired incident” might occur.45

The policy of ‘controlled bias’ soon began, nevertheless, to show signs of breaking down. As recently as December 1959, when Menzies visited Indonesia, the Liberal Government seems to have thought it might just keeping bilateral relations with the Republic afloat, and continue to witness a decline in the PKI’s prospects – all without fatally undermining Dutch resolve. Such judgements of the success, and the potential, of Australian policy began to take a beating after mid-1960. The major contributing factor in this trend seems to have surrounded events in Jakarta. In the first place, in spite of the concession of Australia’s non-party principal status made to Subandrio, and repeated to Sukarno, the expected pay-off in terms of neighbourly cordiality – even in the sense of a slowing of deterioration in the bilateral relationship – showed no signs of coming. In September, Shaw wrote from Jakarta that

41 The expression was used by Crocker in 1955 when Ambassador to Indonesia. See cablegram 525 from Crocker to Casey, 20 November 1955, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 18, NAA.
42 Cablegram 373 to Jakarta, 27 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.
43 Circular cablegram from Canberra, 29 July 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA.
44 See conversation between Barwick and Helmi, 16 May 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 40, NAA.
45 Circular cablegram from Canberra, 29 July 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 41, NAA. In May, concern over Dutch-Indonesian tension was great enough for the Acting Prime Minister, John McEwen, to give an “oral report” to Cabinet. Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 31 May 1960, in A4943, Vol. 3, NAA.
In explaining to the Indonesians our support for the Dutch position in West New Guinea, we have endeavoured to say that this is something which should not affect our otherwise cordial relations. This is not the case and we suffer more than any other country because of our support for the Dutch...At present our influence on the Indonesian Government is negligible.  

The DEA, while admitting that WNG had soured Indonesia’s relations with Australia, argued that the “main impediment to co-operation has been Indonesian suspicion of the West.”  

In other words, a challenge was issued to the notion that WNG was in fact central to a positive atmosphere between Australia and Indonesia. Hard evidence of the influence of this claim on Menzies is difficult to obtain, but it seems likely from later changes in the Prime Minister’s thinking that the idea of WNG having little significance on relations began to influence him in the period between mid to late 1960.

There was another charge by the DEA that would have bothered him further. It was alleged that the West’s position on WNG was unlikely to disadvantage decisively moderate forces in their fight against the PKI. The emergence of a strong Cabinet view to the contrary, combined with the overriding fear of a communist takeover in Jakarta, had been behind the shifts in Australian WNG policy in 1958-59. Menzies might have been unimpressed by the DEA’s reasoning, which at one level was a simple re-statement of an official line used with the Americans for most of the 1950s, but for one apparent reality: the PKI, after early set-backs under ‘Guided Democracy’, was gaining strength amidst domestic and political chaos in spite of growing Dutch isolation over WNG. Thus, Menzies wrote to Beale on 21 September that the PKI’s “strength derives primarily from Indonesia’s domestic misgovernment not from Dutch policy.”

There were some early hints that this logic was pushing Menzies towards stronger support for the Netherlands. In a talk with Luns in New York, the Prime Minister reportedly said “Australia regarded the presence of the Dutch... as vital to Australia and the entry of Indonesia to West New Guinea as a catastrophe”. This was a much stronger statement than Menzies would have allowed himself earlier in the year. A creep backward had started to occur in his thinking, one not yet rapid, or fully self-conscious, but nevertheless real.

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46 Shaw to Menzies, 24 September 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.
47 Memorandum entitled “Notes On Djakarta Despatch No. 12 of 24 September, 1960”, undated, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA. No authorship is acknowledged, though from marginal notes, and an earlier promise by Heydon to write a critique of this despatch (see Heydon to Tange, 30 September 1960, in the same file), it seems to have been the work of Heydon, Blakeney, and Hamilton.
48 loc.cit.
49 Cablegram 1326 from Menzies to Beale, 21 September 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 10, NAA.
50 Record by Luns related in conversation between J. G. de Beus (Dutch Ambassador, Canberra) and Tange, 11 October 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.
51 Viviani, op.cit., p. 198, mistakenly interprets the re-emergence of a more orthodox policy under Menzies to the public reaction following the Casey-Subandrio statement. Phelps, op.cit., pp. 328, 333-35.
In what was one of the great ironies of the WNG dispute, in the period between December 1960 and February 1961 confirmation of a change in outlook in the Australian Cabinet against Indonesia accompanied early stages of a reversal in US policy. The same events which began to turn the State Department towards a more radical stand on Irian turned Australia to a more conservative position, and this began to reverse the trend of increasing US-Australian cooperation and understanding on issues pertinent to Australia’s ‘near north’.

Late in the year, Menzies’ movement away from a WNG policy more sensitive to Indonesia was challenged and further stimulated by some strong representations from Shaw. On 10 December the latter wrote to Menzies directly, arguing that “[Australia and Indonesia] should have a complementary and not a rival relationship in world affairs”. He believed the “development of such a complementary relationship cannot proceed as long as Australia is committed to active support of the Netherlands position in West New Guinea.”52 In a subsequent despatch, written on the same day, Shaw added:

The choice for Australia, seen in an over-simplified form from Djakarta, would appear to lie between, on the one hand a more confident acceptance of the Indonesian Republic – and this would mean disentangling ourselves from our present identification with Dutch interests in West New Guinea –, and, on the other hand, acceptance of the inevitability of a hostile attitude towards ourselves by Indonesia which might be passive, but which could be active.53

Menzies told Tange that he had read the Ambassador’s notes “with some disquiet.”54 Though he later gave nothing away to Shaw by saying both that his “mind was open” in connection with the Ambassador’s personal opinions, and that he knew some of Shaw’s views “were not accepted in the Department”,55 his “disquiet” must be interpreted within the context of the issues that had begun to bother him earlier. Shaw’s view on transfer equated with Cabinet’s emergency option of 5 January, yet the memoranda in which it was conveyed seemed to illustrate the DEA assessment in action; Indonesia was anti-Western and anti-Australian, and nothing conceded on WNG would help in the fight against communism and for a better bilateral relationship.

does not identify a change, instead pointing to a “duality”. The reasons for the emergence of this “duality” are not explained.

52 Shaw to Menzies, 10 December 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.
53 Shaw to Menzies, 10 December 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.
54 See Menzies’ minute of 19 December 1960 on note from Tange to Menzies, 17 December 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.
55 Record of Menzies’ conversation of 30 January 1961 with Shaw in Heydon to Tange, 2 February 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 44, NAA.
In the US, similarly important changes had been occurring. After a series of departmental meetings on WNG in the summer of 1960, Under Secretary of State Livingston T. Merchant commissioned the Policy Planning Staff to write a paper incorporating a re-evaluation of US policy. The study, which covered 18 pages, was passed to Merchant on 12 October 1960. The central question was, as stated in the opening section, to “determine whether the US position...which is now one of neutrality, should be modified, and if so, how.” The basic argument of the paper was that the interests of the “Free World”, along with those of the US, the Netherlands, and Indonesia, had been “badly damaged by the...quarrel over West New Guinea”, and that it would be impossible to resist calls for another 10 years to a change to the Dutch administration.

However, none of the main alternatives canvassed were seen as capable or worthy of immediate implementation. For example, urging the Dutch to turn the territory over to Indonesia was perceived as too damaging to relations with America’s NATO ally, whilst independence was seen as impractical within a decade. A condominium would, it was thought, simply “transfer the dispute to West New Guinea itself.” Consequently, it was suggested that a final answer might be determined after an interim solution was first found. A trusteeship with the UN itself as administrator was envisaged as providing the best hope. It was recommended that the US Government pursue this option by first approaching Australia, and then Indonesia and the Netherlands simultaneously. If US ideas met with resistance, other solutions put forward by the objecting power(s) would be considered. If these were not worthy of American support, it was proposed that the US consider making their efforts public, and mobilizing world opinion in favour of a UN trusteeship.

Merchant judged the paper “excellent”, and commented that the Far Eastern and European Bureaus agreed with its conclusions and recommendations. Such unanimity was significant. Throughout the 1950s these Bureaus had disagreed, often bitterly, over the direction of US WNG policy, but recent events had convinced both sides that a solution to the dispute had to be sought. Without the approval of the executive, these moves toward change were not official, but consensus in the State Department over the

56 For a summary of the background to this paper, and action taken on it, see an editorial note in FRUS, Vol. XVII, 1958-60, ‘Indonesia’, pp. 564-65.
need for something different certainly carried with it the distinct possibility of alterations at the highest level.

Merchant had recommended to Herter (now Dulles’ successor as Secretary of State) that State confine itself to approaching the Australians for the moment. Consequently, J. Graham Parsons (Assistant Secretary, Far Eastern Affairs) contacted the Australian Embassy. He said that “free world interests had been damaged by the continuance of the quarrel between [the] Netherlands and Indonesia over Dutch New Guinea”, and added that the US position was now “lamentable”. He suggested that it might be possible to solve the dispute by pushing for a trusteeship that took account of both the Dutch desire for self-determination, and the Indonesian demand that sovereignty be given to the Republic.

The Australian response was notable. Though no definite answer was given, a cable to Washington – most probably approved by Menzies – made points and posed a number of questions that implied an essentially negative attitude. For instance, it was stated that “The essential basis and objective of the United Nations Trusteeship System...is self determination”, and it was subsequently asserted that:

It would not be consistent with the United Nations Charter to establish a trusteeship which provided for, or implied, limitation of choice on the part of the indigenous people concerned. At the time an election was to be made various questions could, of course, be put by plebiscite...It would only be at this point that the possibility of the marriage of the Dutch and Indonesian objectives could be practically considered.

The re-emergence of a more traditional WNG policy suggested by this was confirmed a month later in a Cabinet submission by Menzies on the US proposals. While the Prime Minister wrote that the notion of trusteeship “was clearly of the greatest importance to Australia”, he remarked that he had decided – in consultation with other Ministers and Beale – that “our initial response should show objective interest, should temporize and point out the problems.” Menzies did not want to commit Australia to rejection of what might become a reality, but he wanted events controlled in a manner capable of excluding Indonesian influence. The comments he suggested might be made to the Americans through the Embassy in Washington made this clear. The first was that “There would be little prospect of attaining genuine

59 loc. cit.
60 Cablegram 3217 from Washington, 30 November 1960, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 11, NAA.
61 See reference to a planned conversation between Menzies and Tange, to be held on 4 January for the purpose of discussing US representations, in Heydon to Tange, 4 January 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 11, NAA.
62 Emphasis original. Cablegram 17 to Washington, 5 January 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 11, NAA.
63 Submission No. 991, 6 February 1961, in A5818/2, Vol. 24, AA.
guarantees of self-determination under a new trust agreement; but once the Dutch had launched the proposal in the United Nations there would be little prospect of withdrawing." Secondly, it was to be stressed that Australia’s "defence interest in Netherlands New Guinea in terms of the status of the territory in war and the availability of bases there to us or to an enemy was involved." These points would not have surprised the Americans (for much of the Australian Cabinet changes since 1959 had been concealed from them), but such remarks were certainly not indicative of the policy that had produced such dismissive treatment of the DEA-DT paper of March 1960.

Later in the month, another Cabinet meeting on WNG was held, the result of which was basically a ratification of Menzies’ paper of 6 February. It was widely agreed that a UN trusteeship “bristled with difficulties”, and that while Australia did not oppose trusteeship in principle, “the administering authority would need to be the Netherlands.” It was also recommended that the Americans should be asked to make it clear to the USSR and Indonesia that it believed in self-determination. Finally, the idea that the UN could unilaterally make decisions on territorial sovereignty was again derided. This was a firm line, though Cabinet chose not to look closely at the crisis surrounding growing Indonesian belligerence, or at the viability of an interim Dutch administration and an independent WNG. It was not that the Ministers were unaware; Menzies had informed Cabinet of these problems, and it was axiomatic that there would be numerous obstacles to the defence of a traditional policy. Therefore, the essence of Cabinet thinking must be interpreted as an optimistic decision to play for time. The hope was that this would enable events to be turned so that Australian hopes – that is, the completion of Dutch rule and Papuan self-determination – could be brought to fruition. As the record of the meeting read: "Cabinet agreed generally that there was much in favour of politically delaying tactics".

IV

This unexpected reversion of Australian policy inevitably poses two wider questions: did the return to a traditional stand signify recantation of the notion that Australia should fear Indonesia, and therefore annulment of the idea that the country was (and

54 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, Canberra, 21 February 1961, in A4943, Vol. 4, NAA.
55 In his submission, Menzies wrote that “The objections to this [US] proposal have to be weighed against the hazards of the present situation, and against our judgement of the kind of result which the Dutch programme of early handover to the natives will produce, assuming that Indonesia does not resort to force.” Submission No. 969, undated, in A5818/2, Vol. 23, NAA.
56 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 21 February 1961, in A4943, Vol. 4, NAA.
must attempt to be) dependent on the UK and US? Secondly, and interrelated, had Cabinet come to believe that rejection of the conception of Australia as an ‘imperial’ power was a mistake?

Closer examination of the Government’s behaviour shows that the surprising changes in WNG policy did not infer such dramatic alteration at a broader level. In connection with fear of Indonesia, the logic behind Menzies’ revision of the NNG problem is instructive. The Prime Minister did not decide to review the weaker and more conditional policy of January 1959 because he believed Indonesia’s political orientation and military strength were no longer dangerous to Australia. To the contrary, he still viewed a communist takeover to be genuinely possible, and he was aware that the ability of Indonesia’s armed forces to create a lodgement in WNG, and in the future to menace Australian territory, had not declined, but had actually increased with the influx of US arms during 1959. Menzies had essentially chosen to revert to ‘old’ policy because he thought that if action on WNG made no difference to Indonesia’s current and potential relations with Australia and the West, there was little point in holding to an attitude that was not innately preferred.

It followed from persisting anxiety over Indonesia that Cabinet did not feel Australia to be again basically independent from the US and UK in offshore SEA. Their deterrent influence was needed over WNG, and the allied fight against communism in the archipelago remained critical. Nevertheless, it is true that reversion to orthodox WNG policy involved some willingness to risk friction with the Americans. This points to a belief that Australia could, to an extent, be less dependent on the US than it had been since 1957-58. There are two probable explanations for this. Firstly, in the same way that a less vexatious traditional WNG policy (primarily motivated by fear of Indonesia) had been further encouraged by fear of the US becoming disinterested in Indonesia, the magnitude of America’s material commitment to the anti-communist cause there by 1960 added to decreasing concerns (mainly prompted by notions of the disconnection between WNG and the chaos of domestic politics under Sukarno) over the effect of taking a more irritating conventional stand. Secondly, it is likely, given what was to happen later, that divergence with the US was estimated as being of short duration; there were hopes of soon convincing the US – particularly after failed attempts to appease the Indonesians over Irian – of the now seemingly obvious nature of this disconnection. Taken together, these explanations of greater independence do not speak of the 1950s-style perception of independence south of Singapore. The new form was not founded on the concept of Indonesia’s insignificance and Australian superiority.
Rather, it was limited to WNG, and was finite even in that context; specifically, it was based on the faith that a fortunate set of circumstances compelled the US to carry the Indonesian problem (on which Australia was helplessly dependent) in a manner unharmful to Dutch sovereignty (possession of which was dependent on US and UK deterrent action).

Collating the above, Australia emerges in the eyes of Cabinet not as a reconstructed imperial power, but as a still weakened force with somewhat renewed prospects of retaining a portion previously indicative of former glory. Indeed, proactive regional security was now more the domain of friendly outside forces, yet offered the opportunity to continue a rearguard action – which would, after all, not prove incompatible with Australia’s more humble status in the area once Indonesian communism was neutralized – the Menzies Government thought it foolish to demur. This, therefore, was the task to which authorities in Canberra devoted themselves until December 1961.
From March to November 1961 many international changes relevant to the dispute, and which had arisen in 1960, matured. British and American interest in policy re-evaluation was superseded in each country by bipartisan commitment to push for a solution. The Dutch chose an even more radical means of shedding WNG, and the Indonesians, for their part, built substantially on the atmosphere of crisis that had arisen from the Karel Doorman affair. These developments were to converge in the final resolution of the dispute in December 1961 and January 1962. What proved extraordinary from an Australian perspective was that such phenomena were constantly misinterpreted or missed in Canberra as the Government forged ahead with its policy of blocking effective Indonesian penetration.

The Cabinet decisions of 21 February (that is, to play for time, and obstruct actions prejudicial to self-determination) were foremost in Menzies’ mind when he arrived in Washington in early March. His meeting with new US President John F. Kennedy would have been seen as a prime opportunity to influence the new administration, perhaps against its bureaucracy, as it began the process of formulating WNG policy. In a cablegram to John McEwen (Australian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade) and Harold Holt (Australian Minister for Labour and National Service), Menzies described how he had talked with the President “over a couple of hours”, and was able to “tell him about the New Guinea problem in its proper historic and national setting.” He continued:

You will remember that some notions were being evolved on the official level in the State Department about a trusteeship for West New Guinea which would exclude the Netherlands. I am sure that this has not been adopted by either Kennedy or [Secretary of State Dean] Rusk, and that after our discussions, there may be a healthy disposition to preserve the status quo in West New Guinea.

This rosy picture was characteristic of the tone of the rest of the document. Indeed, he also commented that “Both Kennedy and Rusk possess the advantage of high intelligence”, and that “the new President ought to do a great deal to rescue American policy from the doldrums.” Finally, in the rapturous vein in which the young President had been greeted in many parts of the world, Menzies added that “Kennedy is, in

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1 Cablegram 131 from Menzies to McEwen and Holt, 4 March 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
physical appearance and personality, so much better than his television image that I was both relieved and delighted."

There were soon signs, however, that the election of the Democrats might not have been as advantageous as it had seemed. Towards the end of March, External Affairs learnt that the State Department had not done away with ideas of trusteeship. More problematic again was the news that – as James Bell (Director, SW Pacific Affairs, State Department) made clear – US proposals were geared towards a “solution” of the WNG dispute. On 6 April, a cable from Beale strongly suggested that such an attitude had been approved by the executive. Kennedy told the Ambassador that “his problem was to try and put forward some solution or proposal which could head off any Indonesian action”, and he asked for Beale’s view on trusteeship. Commenting on Beale’s reply, he said that he agreed with the principle of self-determination, but returned to the question of what, consistent with this principle, could be done to prevent the Indonesians from resorting to force. Ominously, he had said earlier: “Tell me, how seriously does Australia really view the idea of Indonesia getting Dutch New Guinea?” Though perhaps slow in grasping that the President was considering the idea of a solution in Indonesia’s favour, Beale was less sure than Menzies had been of the direction of US policy; Kennedy “seemed” to understand and even sympathize, “but”, he wrote, “I cannot of course judge what effect, if any, his reputed anti-colonial sentiments, and those of some of his advisers, may have.”

Beale’s doubt was certainly justified. While the Australians may not have seen it clearly, the US decision to search for a solution represented the first time the Americans had taken a positive step, as opposed to their previous position of non-active neutrality. The State Department had generated momentum in this direction with their approach to the Australians in late 1960, and this was maintained by a series of telegrams from Ambassador Jones early in the new year. Kennedy’s White House advisors, who were keen to devise a new approach to Third World problems, also added their voice to the

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2 Conversation between Isinger and Hamilton, 30 March 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
3 R. L. Harry (First Assistant Secretary, DEA) to Tange, 5 April 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
4 Beale to Menzies, 825, 6 April 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
6 See Pemberton, *All the Way*, p. 83, for comment on the new administration’s attitude towards underdeveloped countries.
calls for change.\textsuperscript{7} The debate in Washington was, by this stage, dominated by those who saw the need for these changes as being self evident.

This is not to say agreement existed as to how to intervene in the dispute, or that a final decision had been made by the President. On 3 April, Rusk submitted a memorandum to Kennedy dealing with trusteeship.\textsuperscript{8} It was essentially a revised version of the Policy Planning Staff paper of October 1960.\textsuperscript{9} However, owing to the problems experienced in the Congo by the UN, it was suggested that Malaya be made trustee of WNG under UN auspices, with administration by the Organisation itself kept only as a secondary option. Robert W. Komer of the NSC Staff immediately attacked these ideas. In a letter to the President’s Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Walt W. Rostow, he wrote:

State’s West New Guinea memo...puts the issue clearly, but comes up with no commensurate solution. If the prime reason for a policy shift is to keep Indonesia from sliding away, we must come up with a solution which is broadly satisfactory to the Indonesians...State's proposal...will incur all the disadvantages of outraging the Dutch, Australians, et al without satisfying [the] Indos. Why move at all in this case?...Of course, if we are proposing trusteeship as a cover operation for eventually giving WNG to the Indonesians, it might make sense. But if this is the case, why not tell the President? And why not spell out how the proposal...could be used to convince Sukarno that we are really moving in this direction....The trouble with State is that it never thinks these problems through to the end.\textsuperscript{10}

Kennedy’s conversation with Beale, in which the President mentioned both trusteeship and transfer to Indonesia, suggests that he was weighing the alternatives presented by the State Department and his White House advisors, and had not come to a firm conclusion. In fact, much of American activity in 1961 was characterized by vigorous debate and indecision, resulting in a ‘muddling through’ of the problems of the year. Nevertheless, it was a clumsy policy that, given its primary objective of achieving a final and peaceful solution to the dispute, had an important impact on the policies of the parties involved, and on the eventual outcome.

The UK did not have a major role in the course of events regarding WNG in the early part of the year. This aside, it is worth noting that consensus developed in the Foreign Office concerning the need to push for a long-term solution – as opposed to the Australian policy of waiting. The British were concerned at the momentum being

\textsuperscript{7} For example, see Robert W. Komer (NSC Staff) to McGeorge Bundy (President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs), 27 March 1961, in FRUS, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, pp. 333-34.
\textsuperscript{8} Tab A attached to Dean Rusk (US Secretary of State) to J. F. Kennedy (US President), 3 April 1961, in \textit{ibid.}, pp. 336-39.
\textsuperscript{9} See the editorial comment in footnote 2, \textit{ibid.}, p. 341.
\textsuperscript{10} Komer to Walt W. Rostow (Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs), 5 April 1961, in \textit{ibid.}, p. 340.
generated by the Indonesians in the direction of a resolution in the Republic's favour. As F. A. Warner (head, SEA Department, FO) expressed it:

With the initiative now in the hands of the Indonesians, it may be that the greatest danger for the Dutch, the Australians and ourselves is to do nothing and leave the field to the Indonesians. The idea of a "Melanesian Federation" offers the least risk of allowing the territory to fall into Indonesian hands whilst offering the best prospects for an ultimate solution. Finally, self-determination for the Melanesians is the only device which can possibly be expected to appeal to the Afro-Asians as an alternative to Indonesian colonialism.\(^{11}\)

Aside from these vital short-term considerations, it was believed that an independent Papuan state would be a "poor and weak state, wide open to Indonesian penetration or attack."\(^{12}\) A federation was thus also an attractive long-term proposition. This concept was discussed with the Americans in February and March who, while not completely dismissing the proposal, judged it to be of little help in dealing with the "immediate problem".\(^{13}\) Although the British retorted with their own views of the weaknesses of US ideas — they expressed "doubts" vis-à-vis trusteeship\(^{14}\) — their particular opinions on WNG in reality counted for little in Washington at this point. On the other hand, their clear anxieties were not unimportant in this period in that they contributed to perhaps the most significant dynamic of the WNG controversy in 1961: the further growth of the feeling among the international community, springing from events in 1960, that the question could not be left to fester.

II

As the British and Americans began to act on their fears, the Australians, walking consistently along a traditional path, as Menzies' visit to Washington had confirmed, allowed the continued re-emergence of 1950s relational patterns regarding the Dutch and Indonesians. With regard to the latter, this, in the present climate, and given events since 1957-58, of course meant much worse relations than the poor ones of the past decade. An exchange between Menzies and Subandrio early in the year revealed this unmistakably. Subandrio wrote to the Prime Minister in late January, explaining that tensions between Australia and Indonesia had increased, and urging Menzies to look to the future, rather than the "irrealistic [sic] and irrational past."\(^{15}\) He also hinted that armed conflict was a possibility. In his reply, Menzies said elements that might breach

\(^{11}\) Minute by F. A. Warner (head, SEA Department, FO), 13 February 1961, in FO 159993, PRO.
\(^{12}\) Minute by Warner, 11 January 1961, in FO 159993, PRO.
\(^{13}\) Telegram 155 (Saving) from Sir Harold Caccia (British Ambassador, Washington DC) to the FO, 3 March 1961, in FO 371/160007, PRO.
\(^{15}\) Subandrio to Menzies, undated, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 44, NAA.
Indonesian guarantees of no force could be restrained, and he warned that infiltrations were incompatible with these assurances and international law. Infiltrations would, he said, discredit the party concerned. Notably, Menzies also emphasized that Australian policy was far from weak on the question of self-determination:

The views of both Government and Opposition parties expressed in Parliament demonstrate that there is strong attachment to the view that these people are entitled to make their own choice of government. This the Dutch are pledged to permit, and you and the Netherlands have not been able to come to agreement.

Given the hardening attitude of Sukarno and his followers, these were hardly innocuous words. When told of the main points in Menzies’ letter, Subandrio answered that arguments about self-determination were secondary to the problem of Australia’s confidence in Indonesia. More threateningly, he went on to say that it would be possible for the Indonesian press to begin discussing Australia’s immigration policy or what was occurring in ENG. A week later Shaw wrote that the Sukarno’s Supreme Advisory Council had highlighted Indonesia’s opposition to colonial imperialists “and their supporters”, and that there existed the possibility that the Australian Embassy, or his residence, may come under attack.

Such deterioration failed to move authorities in Cabinet for the same reasons the 1959 attempt at détente had been abandoned; WNG was viewed as peripheral to Indonesia’s flirtations with communism, and to disintegrating bilateral relations. On 18 February a circular cable had been sent from the DEA claiming that Indonesian activities were geared towards encouraging the idea that the frustration of the Irian campaign was opening Indonesia to the communist powers, and reducing the potential impact of the West in the Republic. It continued:

The New Guinea dispute is an obstacle...but the basic obstacles to significantly improved relations between Indonesia and the West are ideological....We do not see what the United States or other Western powers can do to remove these obstacles – so long at least as Sukarno remains in power.

Shaw’s reaction was vehement. He said that WNG was “the major obstacle” to better relations with the West, and that the Republic’s leaning towards the communist bloc

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16 Menzies to Subandrio, 21 February 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 44, NAA.
17 Shaw to Barwick (Acting Minister for External Affairs), 3 March 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA.
18 Cablegram 126 from Shaw, 10 March 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA. This was written in the context of concern over Australia’s participation in the forthcoming opening ceremony for the NNG native council, but it is likely that the dangers spoken of were the result of a number of indicators that the Australian attitude had been hardening. (The Supreme Advisory Council was a consultative political body incorporated into Sukarno’s concept of ‘Guided Democracy’, see Feith, op.cit., p. 592.)
19 Circular cablegram from Canberra, 18 February 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA.
could be traced to the Bloc's support on anti-colonial issues, including WNG.20 Elsewhere, in a personal letter to Heydon, Shaw commented that "I cannot imagine an appreciation of Indonesian policy in such terms as those in the Departmental circular coming from the pen of any senior External Affairs officer who has served in the past few years at this post...it is regrettable that we should not have been able to keep in the South East Asia Branch...one at least of the small number of...officers who have served in Indonesia in recent years."21 Shaw's remonstrances were to no avail. He was outnumbered in the Department, and could expect no aid at a Ministerial level.

Not surprisingly, the resurgence of a conservative policy effected something of a Dutch-Australian rapprochement. Menzies had met Luns in Geneva shortly after speaking to Kennedy. The atmosphere appears to have been cosy, and they agreed on various points - including the way in which the Dutch would behave regarding a UN fait accompli, and on the importance of playing the self-determination "card" with Third World leaders.22 Earlier, Sir Edwin McCarthy (Australian Ambassador to the Netherlands) had written that "Here the view is that Australia is playing their part in the public approval they are giving to the Dutch policy of self determination."23 He would not have been able to make such an observation at times in 1960, but it was one that became increasingly valid throughout 1961, as reflected in growing cooperation and cordiality between Canberra and The Hague.

Another positive for the Australian Government was the strength of the Dutch Government and public on the question of self-determination - at least as Ambassador McCarthy presented it. On 10 February, he had written that "in the reasonably near future there will be no political move towards withdrawal", and although he noted the electorate might force such a solution if WNG was truly threatened, he added that public opinion was not disturbed.24 In June he said that, contrary to US suggestions, Luns had strong support for his WNG policy in the Dutch Cabinet unless serious trouble developed.25 As Cabinet and the DEA did not think it particularly likely that large-scale

20 Savingram 33 from Shaw, 4 March 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA.
21 Shaw to Heydon, 4 March 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA.
22 Cablegram 131 from Menzies to McEwen and Holt, 4 March 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
23 McCarthy to Tange, 10 February 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA.
24 loc.cit.
25 Cablegram 1516 from Menzies to Beale, 9 June 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
fighting would occur,\textsuperscript{26} this seemed singularly good news, and it added to the optimistic atmosphere prevalent in Canberra.\textsuperscript{27}

III

The tenor of events was, however, far from uniformly sweet for the Australian Government. In the first place, the Americans made it clear that they continued to be interested in solving the dispute, and the Australians detected signs that some of them were prepared to compromise on the principle of self-determination. On 10 April, Beale was informed by the State Department that the Americans felt a UN trusteeship administered by Malaya offered the best chance of success.\textsuperscript{28} The Ambassador felt that the proposal indicated “an encouraging awareness of and sympathy for Australia’s position”, but Menzies thought it necessary to have Beale seek assurances that the US held self-determination to be of first importance in any arrangement, that this be publicly declared by them, and that nothing be done against the wishes of the Dutch.\textsuperscript{29} Later, Menzies was disturbed when he heard that Dean Acheson, who no longer held a position in the US Government, but nevertheless appears to have retained some influence,\textsuperscript{30} had described self-determination as “one of Woodrow Wilson’s less intelligent expressions”.\textsuperscript{31} He replied:

I must admit I was disappointed that Acheson should ridicule self-determination (even if he did so in jest). Apart from the importance of the principle itself, I should have expected Acheson to recognize the political importance internationally of active native participation in the processes looking towards self-determination. We regard the principle as important not only for Dutch New Guinea but also for Papua/New Guinea.\textsuperscript{32}

Behind the scenes, the Americans were acting in a manner consistent with the desire for a solution, though their uncertainty as to how to go about this resulted in equivocal signals. During a visit by Luns to Washington, Kennedy made the Dutch

\textsuperscript{26} See Tange’s comments in the record of his informal discussions at the Commonwealth Record Office, 22 March 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 45, NAA.
\textsuperscript{27} As an aside, it should be noted that Australian officials were, strangely enough, often more positive during 1961 than events apparently warranted. This divergence between fact and perception may not have applied to the Dutch stance, but it is an observation that is applicable to most aspects of Australian WNG policy at this time.
\textsuperscript{28} Cablegram 855 from Beale to Menzies, 10 April 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
\textsuperscript{29} Draft cablegram from Menzies to Beale, undated, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA. It is not clear if this cable was sent, though there is no minute to suggest (as there might usually be) it was not.
\textsuperscript{30} See, for example, footnote 2, p. 391, in \textit{FRUS}, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’.
\textsuperscript{31} Cablegram 1240 from Beale to Menzies, 12 May 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA. Dean Acheson (in 1961, Head, Advisory Group, NATO) followed this up with a proposal that Australia take over WNG as trustee, an idea that Beale took him to be broaching in seriousness, but one that must perhaps be interpreted as a cynical stab at what the American saw as the lack of realism in Australian policy.
\textsuperscript{32} Cablegram 897 from Menzies to Beale, 1 June 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA, AA.
Foreign Minister aware that the US had been thinking of ways to bring the dispute to an end, and that he wanted Luns' views on this.\textsuperscript{33} The latter replied that “the Dutch were willing to explore with the United States any and all formulae which might promote a solution”, though both he and van Roijen repeatedly emphasized the Netherlands' commitment to self-determination. Luns also pressed for the continued building of a deterrent. Kennedy avoided answering this directly, commenting that “the problem was how the case could be put on the most favorable basis from the point of view of all concerned”. He also warned that the US “wanted to be sure that what we do is in accordance with the common interest”, in spite of the fact that they “were not unmindful of Dutch views”.

The tone of Kennedy's talk with Luns was not particularly sympathetic to the Dutch, but this contrasted with Rusk's discussions with Luns.\textsuperscript{34} The Secretary of State conceded that self-determination was “basic to U.S. policy generally”, and said the US recognized this was the Dutch stance on WNG. Thus, the “problem was...how to find an answer on the basis of self-determination” – and it was here that Rusk said the US thought “a trusteeship offered possibilities.” Various arrangements were suggested in this context, including a Malaya-New Zealand trusteeship. Rusk even suggested that Indonesia could be isolated in the UN if it opposed trusteeship. He added that the US would warn Indonesia regarding the use of force if a trusteeship were put in place, and he made it clear that this warning would not be bluff.\textsuperscript{35}

The cleavage between Rusk and Kennedy implied by these talks was not substantiated by a discussion between the President and Sukarno at the White House.\textsuperscript{36} Rather, it was the indeterminate nature of US policy, within the bounds of the search for a solution, that was noticeable.\textsuperscript{37} Having been unforthcoming regarding the Dutch, Kennedy surprisingly treated Sukarno in a similar manner. Predictably, within a few minutes of meeting Kennedy, Sukarno launched into a heartfelt plea for US help on Irian:

please understand us in our national aspirations... How many times have I spoken to your Ambassador and pled for America's support for the restoration of this territory to us. Let America say just one word to the effect that West Irian is a just claim. Give me something to say


\textsuperscript{34} Conversation between Luns, Rusk, and officials from both countries, 10 April 1961, in \textit{ibid.}, pp. 352-60.

\textsuperscript{35} These ideas were repeated the following day at the Dutch Embassy. See conversation between Luns, Rusk, van Roijen and Kohler, 11 April 1961, in \textit{ibid.}, pp. 361-63.

\textsuperscript{36} Conversation between Kennedy, Rusk, Sukarno, Subandrio and others, 24 April 1961, in \textit{ibid.}, pp. 382-90.

\textsuperscript{37} Pemberton, apparently incorrectly, has asserted that US policy was by this time geared towards ceding WNG to Indonesia. See Pemberton, \textit{All the Way}, p.89.
to my people....Before 1950, America said that Indonesia has the right to freedom. Why don’t you say so now? Why don’t you support our just claim to West Irian? The only answer to that question I have had is your friendship with the Dutch and your relations with NATO. America should not play the role of a tight-rope dancer between Europe and Asia, always keeping a balance.

Kennedy replied by asking why Indonesia wanted WNG, considering that Melanesians were different racially and that Irian was, financially, a deficit area. Indeed, the US President thoroughly interrogated his Indonesian counterpart on a range of issues, clearly putting Sukarno on the defensive. He even suggested – no doubt much to Sukarno’s annoyance – that a plebiscite should be held in WNG to determine whether the people wanted to join the Republic. Nevertheless, and consistent with the one solid point in the US program, Kennedy said that “We want to see this [WNG] matter come to an amicable conclusion”.

In Canberra, at around the same time, the Menzies Government hosted General Nasution, Australia’s “hope” in Indonesia.38 The Australians perhaps wanted to bolster Nasution’s prestige in the Republic by allowing him to show he had been well received in Australia, but Nasution, like Subandrio, knew that a success on the Irian issue was the yardstick by which the visit would be measured at home. Prior to his departure, he said that Australian-Indonesian relations had become “weak” because it was thought “Australia is on the Dutch side”, and he remarked that the aim of his trip was to eliminate misunderstandings.39 He received less joy than Subandrio had. His talks with Cabinet, and with Menzies personally, brought to light little that was new, though they illustrated how deep the divide between the two countries had become. The Australians constantly emphasized the need for self-determination, and deprecated the occasional manipulation of the dispute to crisis point, while Nasution explained the Indonesian position along standard lines.40 He also said he hoped to get Australia to maintain a neutral position like the US.41 This was the most significant idea to emerge from the talks, and it was one that Menzies interpreted as being part of a drive to make the Netherlands appear as though they were isolated on the international scene.42 Nasution made it clear that he thought the direction of events in the Netherlands was moving the

38 The expression is that of former Australian diplomat Pierre Hutton. See P. Hutton, After the Heroic Age And Before Australia’s Rediscovery of Southeast Asia, Brisbane, 1997, p. 58.
39 Cablegram 215 from Jakarta, 17 April 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 46, NAA.
40 See, for example, Nasution’s meeting with Cabinet, 18 April 1961, and his meeting with Menzies, Tange, E. J. Bunting (Secretary, Australian Prime Minister’s Department) and Athol Townley (Australian Minister of Defence), 19 April 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 46, NAA.
41 Meeting between Nasution, Menzies, Tange, and Townley, 19 April 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 46, NAA.
42 See Cablegram 146, Menzies to Sir K. J. Holyoake (Prime Minister, New Zealand), 21 April 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 46, NAA.
Dutch Government closer to capitulation, and he wanted Australia to cease propping it up.  

The General received little comfort from Menzies on this point. In a final talk at Kirribilli House, the Prime Minister said that Australia could not be expected to “support a course of action which was inconsistent with self-determination”, and that they would not put pressure on the Netherlands to alter their position. He added that he did not want Nasution to believe Australia was indifferent to the use of force. Nasution gave the view that, as a young man, he could afford to wait for WNG to come into Indonesian hands, though President Sukarno was determined to get the territory before he died. His visit to Australia thus ended in a stalemate, and gave no reason for either side to believe that their opinions, or indeed their countries, had moved any closer.

IV

A certain motionlessness, albeit one underlined by great tension, came to characterize the dispute as a whole towards the middle of the year. The State Department, to use Menzies’ words, were still “fumbling around” over the idea of a trusteeship, but failing to come up with anything effective. In late April the Tunku told the Americans that Malaya would act as trustee to WNG on the condition that Sukarno “publicly and unequivocably” accept his country in this role, and that, secondly, any financial consortium established include Australia and New Zealand. The Australians interpreted the first condition as an effective rejection of the initiative, but Rusk evidently did not share this view; he instructed that the Tunku be told “we...are gratified with his initially positive response.” This seemingly prompted the adoption of the Malayan trusteeship proposal as the ‘official’ State Department position. Rusk soon went cold on this idea, however. As a memorandum from W. R. Tyler (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs) explained:

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43 Meeting between Nasution, Menzies, Tange, and Townley, 19 April 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 46, NAA.
44 Meeting between Nasution, Menzies, Townley, and Tange, 26 April 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
45 Record of Menzies’ talk to Foreign Affairs Committee, 20 April 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 46, NAA.
46 Telegram 532 from J. L. O’Sullivan (Deputy Director, SW Pacific Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Department) to Rusk, 23 April 1961, 656.9813/5-2661, box 1352, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
47 Annex to Critchley to Tange, 5 May 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA.
49 W. R. Tyler (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, State Department) to W. L. Blue (Deputy Director, Office of Western European Affairs, Bureau of European Affairs, State Department), 26 May 1961, 656.8913/5-161, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
The Secretary has been reluctant to accept a course of action which would place too heavy a reliance on the U.N. organization as such. He does not believe it feasible to approach Congress with any plan which would require substantial U.S. expenditure to support a West New Guinea trusteeship. He, therefore, is apparently leaning toward a course of action which would bring the two parties together for conciliation or arbitration.50

In this connection, Rusk appears to have believed that a UN Special Committee might investigate the WNG problem and make recommendations51 – presumably regarding a solution.

This plan had not developed to any great degree by the time the Dutch made a decisive move. On 16 June, Ambassador van Roijen told the Americans "he had been instructed to...propose bilateral secret talks looking toward the internationalization of the West New Guinea problem."52 Here, he mentioned the notions of a visiting mission to WNG and trusteeship. Van Roijen said Luns had frequently thought of this in terms of the Somali trusteeship concept, which required "a developmental agency, or some international body and allow the Dutch to remain in West New Guinea for a certain period, thus avoiding the vacuum which was left in the Congo." Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles agreed to talks as long as they were confidential. Significantly, van Roijen concluded by saying "he hoped that the Netherlands would have U.S. support should a plan develop from these talks". Evidently, the Dutch, seeing US support as the critical factor in the successful implementation of their scheme, wanted to manoeuvre the Americans into a position of commitment. At a wider level, the Netherlands Government seems to have been thinking hard on how to reconcile growing anti-colonial pressure – not to mention domestic nervousness over a continued presence in WNG – with a desire to deny Indonesia the territory. The meeting of 16 June was the opening sortie of a new campaign aimed at achieving this.

At a second meeting on 29 June, the Americans attempted to take advantage of Dutch willingness to change the complexion of the dispute by developing Rusk’s concept of a visiting mission.53 Bowles opened by saying "the situation in West New Guinea was dangerous, that Indonesia was insecure and that she was being played upon by the Soviets", and he felt that Indonesia "might indulge in some unfortunate adventure". He followed by making it clear that the US had decided a UN committee,

50 loc.cit.
which would visit WNG, was "the best solution". This committee would study the problem and make recommendations that the Dutch and Indonesians would have to agree to beforehand. In answer to a question by the Ambassador, Joseph Sisco of the State Department's Bureau of International Organization Affairs, stated that the principle of self-determination could be safeguarded by the committee's terms of reference.

Apart from raising his unhappiness with the idea of agreeing to abide by any ruling made by the UN, van Roijen said he thought his Government "would not find the scheme palatable as the element of expediency is evident and there was not enough protection of the concept of self-determination." A meeting on the following day brought no new results, though each side clarified their position somewhat. The Americans made it clear that their committee would deal with the issue of sovereignty, and admitted that its recommendations could not be guaranteed. Van Roijen, on the other hand, reaffirmed that the Dutch were "anxious to internationalize the West New Guinea problem", but a "proviso" was "that the population have the right of determining their own future".

Van Roijen's views were substantiated by his Government, and conveyed to the Americans during the third meeting in early July. The Hague thought the "United States...proposal is not in harmony with present Dutch thinking", though it did not want to discard US suggestions as it wished to "draw up a catalog of possible courses of action". Van Roijen said the Dutch were still keen on the idea of a trusteeship supported by a development authority or, alternatively, a visiting mission - apparently with far narrower terms of reference than that of a US-inspired political committee. Sisco expressed scepticism regarding the success of any Netherlands initiative in the UN, and the meeting ended on this rather flat note. Thus, the Dutch-American dialogue had resulted in no compromise whatsoever; it had simply highlighted the Netherlands determination to marry termination of sovereignty with genuine Papuan self-determination, and it concurrently underlined the paramount American consideration of finding an amicable solution. Indeed, during the same meeting, van Roijen asserted self-determination was "the most important aspect of Dutch concern", while Tyler had commented that US support for any project "would probably be in direct proportion to the prospects of success for any given proposal."

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54 Conversation between van Roijen and representatives of the State Department, 30 June 1961, 656.9813/6-3061, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
55 Conversation between van Roijen and representatives of the State Department, 3 July 1961, 656.9813/7-361, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
Four more meetings were held in July between the Dutch and the Americans, but they produced no agreement. The US was anxious to discuss the WNG problem with the Indonesians, feeling that would lose "leverage" with the Indonesians the longer they delayed contact, though the Netherlands Government saw no need to involve Jakarta at this point. Rather, the Dutch suggested the US tell the Indonesians that transfer would not bring about a solution, and that "the rights of the Papuans must be respected." Tyler replied that such an approach would be "unproductive". By the end of the month, having failed to achieve the goal of an agreed plan, the Dutch, as implied when they informed the State Department that a decision would be made at The Hague in early August regarding internationalization, chose to implement their ideas unilaterally. The Americans, on the other hand, sought to continue their role as an 'honest broker', and chose to initiate talks with the Indonesians.

V

A day after the last meeting, the Netherlands Ambassador in Canberra presented to the Australian Government some of The Hague’s ideas, which had begun to crystallize. In an aide memoire handed to Menzies and Tange, the Dutch said that they wanted to carry their desire for an international answer to the problem a step further. This involved a proposal to accept UN intervention in some form, as long as self-determination was guaranteed and Indonesia excluded from any control over the territory. The Netherlands Government also pledged to continue to pay for the development of WNG until it gained independence, and it recommended a UN fact-finding mission be sent to the area. In order to test the viability of these objectives, the Dutch wanted the views of the Australians – along with those of a number of other governments, who would be asked whether they would be willing to sponsor such a move.

The Dutch also revealed that they had been engaging in secret consultations with the Americans. They explained that somewhat separate ideas had eventuated from

56 Conversation between Emile Schiff (Minister, Netherlands Embassy, Washington DC) and J. D. Bell (Director, Office of Southwest Pacific Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Department), 14 July 1961, 656.9813/7-1461, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2. For further US views on this issue see conversation between Schiff and representatives of the State Department, 26 July 1961, 656.9813/7-2761, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
57 Conversation between Schiff and representatives of the State Department, 28 July 1961, 656.9813/7-2861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
58 Conversation between Schiff and representatives of the State Department, 31 July 1961, 656.9813/7-3161, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
59 Annex to conversation between Tange and de Beus, 1 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
60 Annex to, and conversation between Tange and de Beus, 1 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
discussions and that, as a result, they had formulated their plans without telling the Americans. Tange told J. G. de Beus (Dutch Ambassador, Canberra) that he had just received news of the existence of such talks, but nothing more, and he said that he "would not have anything substantive to say" on the Dutch propositions because they were of such importance that they necessitated Ministerial consideration.

The next day a cablegram arrived in Canberra outlining US proposals. These were that a resolution should be adopted by the General Assembly citing the WNG question as an "irritant" to certain relationships in the UN, and that a group of countries construct a report with "suggestions for a solution" that would be considered by the Assembly in 1962. Notably, in answer to a comment on Australia's support for the status quo, Bell said that "the status quo had dangerous possibilities", and he hoped the resolution would avoid the use of the term self-determination. In an observation that would have caused further discomfort in the DEA, he said that the initiative would have the support of President Kennedy who had ordered the Secretary to "seek a solution".

These events surprised the Australians. Though there had been hints that the Netherlands might have been working on something, it seems officials in Canberra had been unaware the Dutch and American proposals would be as radical as, in fact, they were. As far as the US was concerned, it had certainly given clues to the way in which its thinking was headed, but the Australians had been unwilling to interpret these as negatively as was perhaps warranted. Now they were suddenly faced with decisions that could have far-reaching consequences, a situation which posed problems for the strategy that had hitherto been utilized. In returning to a more conservative policy, Cabinet had apparently decided not to engage in long-term planning, but rather watch and wait, while having self-determination as a general goal. Consequently, little time had been given to forward planning in the DEA.

The reply to the Dutch — and the initial debate that preceded it — reflected and prolonged this lack of specific direction in Australian WNG policy. In a note to the Minister, Tange recommended that "we raise no objection, but offer our assessment of some of the dangers". He was against actively opposing or endorsing the Dutch

61 Cablegram 1907 from D. J. Munro (Australian Minister, Washington), 31 July 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
62 Conversation between Tange and de Beus, 1 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
63 Cablegram 1918 from Washington, 1 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
64 See cablegram 808 from J. Plimsoll (at this point, Australian Permanent Representative to the UN), 30 June 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 12, NAA. Note that possible Netherlands plans were, furthermore, only seen as coming into effect if WNG was placed on the UN agenda.
65 Tange to Menzies, 2 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.

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proposals, essentially because a choice either for or against contained too many risks.66 A cable from Plimsoll in New York similarly pointed out the possible dangers and benefits of the Dutch initiative, without containing any exact proposals.67 The keynote of his argument was that once a degree of UN jurisdiction was conceded, it might be difficult to prevent an outcome favourable to Indonesia. On the other hand, there was a chance that the General Assembly might be impressed with such a bona fide drive towards self-determination and therefore pave the way for advantageous, hitherto impossible, developments. Whilst Plimsoll emphasized the possible benefits of the Dutch move to a greater degree than Tange – who tended to concentrate on the negative impact of Australian opposition on relations with the Dutch and on voting in the UN – both papers highlighted the pros and cons in such a way as to discourage any strong courses of action.

A fortnight later Tange had changed his mind. He had become anxious that the Australian Government might get left behind as the pace of the dispute quickened. In a letter to Menzies, he described previous policy as preventative – as aimed at knocking back American and Indonesian initiatives that would upset the Dutch program for self-determination – but he believed that “now...something more than mere opposition to political initiatives is required.”68 He suggested Australia might even try to attain a role in the administration of WNG and, in doing so, allow a change in its position in ENG. This kind of approach had some support in the lower levels of the Department. For instance, W. T. Doig of the United Nations Branch wrote:

I suggest with all respect that the current approach to this matter based almost exclusively on the proposition that it is desirable and essential that the status quo be maintained is over-cautious, unhelpful to the Dutch and the Americans, and...in present conditions, not entirely in line with Australia’s interests. The facts of life are such that under current and prospective measures some initiative must be taken and soon, and will take it despite our cautionings...I believe also that in our general and in our more detailed examination of proposals we have tended to adopt a somewhat “restricted” or “limited” approach....We have become, and rightly, fearful of the initiative going “wrong”....I suggest the time is ripe for a very big and bold initiative.69

The Prime Minister and his Cabinet were not interested in this line of thinking. Instead, they preferred action of a reactive kind in protection of self-determination. In a paper considered by Cabinet on 16 August, Menzies argued that, with the continuance of a policy of self-determination, the main issues that needed attention were the minimization, firstly, of damage to Western interests and, secondly, of the risks

66 See his arguments in the memorandum attached to loc.cit.
67 Cablegram 908 from Plimsoll, 2 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
68 Tange to Menzies, 14 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
69 Emphasis original. Doig to Harry, 14 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
associated with the Indonesian claim.\textsuperscript{70} In agreement, Cabinet ratified Menzies' interim reply of 7 August (which offered no advice to the Netherlands Government, yet pointed to potential problems),\textsuperscript{71} and elucidated a number of other risks that should be communicated to the Dutch.\textsuperscript{72}

There was some awareness that the Netherlands initiative could prove disastrous for Papuan prospects. Presumably as precaution for dealing with the Australian public if this occurred, the Ministers ordered that it be re-stressed to the Dutch that "it is the business and responsibility of the Netherlands to decide whether and in what manner to proceed with its general intention to find an international solution". This was as close as Cabinet came to contingency planning. The response to the American proposals, which was effectively dealt with at the same time, made clear that Cabinet's primary goal was to concentrate on defence of the status quo: "Cabinet...endorsed the comment...that we should make strong representations to the United States, as and when necessary, that the future for Western New Guinea should be one which is in the future interests of the inhabitants of both Western and Eastern New Guinea and not merely a settlement of the Indonesian-Dutch dispute for its own sake." It is important to note that this was also an answer to a part of Menzies' submission, in which, for the first time, he directly broached the question of whether Indonesia should be allowed to have the territory.\textsuperscript{73} After presenting some considerations, he had written: "A survey of these...will, I believe, lead Cabinet to conclude that there is no real scope for modification of Australian policy...and thus no question of our contemplating a "solution"'. Cabinet obviously concurred.

On 21 August, Menzies sent a tough message to Rusk. He said that the only way of solving the dispute was by handing the territory to Indonesia, and that he found it "difficult to believe" that this was the US intention.\textsuperscript{74} He added:

\begin{quote}
I cannot see how a policy of virtual open appeasement in the face of armed threats could help us in our general difficulties with Indonesia; nor can I see how so complete a disregard for the interests and rights of the Papuans could be justified to the world.
\end{quote}

Menzies then denigrated the notion of a mission charged with recommending solutions to the problem, and suggested that a fact-finding team under strong leadership would be

\textsuperscript{70} Submission No. 1305, 12 August 1961, in A5818, Vol. 31, NAA.
\textsuperscript{71} See aide memoire attached to conversation between Heydon and Menzies, 9 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA. In his submission, Menzies admitted that a move in the UN might prove advantageous, but he did not extrapolate on the idea, preferring instead to concentrate on the possible pitfalls of such a move. See Submission No. 1305, 12 August 1961, in A5818, Vol. 31, NAA.
\textsuperscript{72} Decision No. 1541, Cabinet meeting, Canberra, 16 August 1961, in A4943, Vol. 5, NAA.
\textsuperscript{73} Submission No. 1305, 12 August 1961, in A5818, Vol. 31, NAA.
\textsuperscript{74} Cablegram 1311 from Menzies to Beale, 21 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
a better option. Furthermore, he thought that if the State Department was unclear on its objectives, Indonesia and its supporters would hijack American moves, and turn them to their own advantage. Finally, in order to counter US fears of an invasion, it was added that according to Australian intelligence, the chance of an attack was no greater than it had been 12 months before.

Rusk’s reply was somewhat evasive, perhaps representing a desire to avoid a clash with the Australians.\(^5\) He said that US ideas did not represent a policy; they were contingency plans that may become an initiative, but not without full consultation with Australia. On the other hand, he asked a series of questions attempting to allay Australian fears,\(^6\) but due to their tone, they may have encouraged doubt in Canberra among those who recognized how quickly the dispute had begun to move. Doubts were certainly justified. The entire American policy-making elite had become serious about finding a way out. A week after contacting the Australians, the Americans had approached the Indonesians. Under instructions from the State Department, Jones told Subandrio that the US “deeply desired [to] help find [an] amicable solution”, and he introduced the idea of a UN commission.\(^7\) He also made it clear that they were not presenting the Indonesians with a plan “cooked up” in cooperation with the Dutch. Initially, Subandrio’s reply was that the US initiative was a “great step forward”, yet later in the conversation he said it would be difficult for his Government to begin dealing with the UN again. Jones pointed out the differences between the resolution favoured by Indonesia in 1957 and the current State Department plan, and he asked whether the Indonesians themselves had any proposals \textit{vis-à-vis} a solution. In concluding, the Ambassador pleaded with Subandrio to give the US suggestion “most serious consideration”, saying that it “represented [the] best Washington thinking to date”, and he hinted that “slamming of [the] door at this point could do serious harm [to the] Indonesian cause.”

Over the course of the following weeks and months, the Indonesians showed themselves as adept at using the situation created by the introduction of American schemes for the projection of their own plans. Their method typically involved the espousal of an attitude that combined elements of both rigidity and apparent

\(^{55}\) Cablegram 2071 from Beale to Menzies, 22 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA.
\(^{66}\) For example: “Was it not possible that a United Nations mission sent out to recommend a solution would come up in its report with an account of the real facts in Netherlands New Guinea?”, and “Would not the United Nations have to take cognizance of the principle of self-determination in dealing with this issue?”
\(^{77}\) Telegram 234 from Jones to Rusk, 8 August 1961, in 656.9813/8-861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
compromise, and they sought to maximize the impact of these aspects by stimulating a sense of crisis. For example, the day after Jones’ *demarche*, Subandrio told him the US approach “could not [have] come at [a] better time” because he, Sukarno and Nasution were set to meet on 12 August to discuss Indonesia’s tactics regarding the Irian problem.\(^7\) He “had [the] feeling”, the Foreign Minister continued, “he would have been fighting a rear guard action against ultimate use of force”, but “Armed with [the] Department suggestion he could focus [the] attention of the group on [a] peaceful solution.” He followed this by expressing doubts as to whether his Government could accept the US ideas because the final status of WNG was “not negotiable” – though the means of achieving this was open to debate. Indonesia recognized an interim solution was necessary “to save Dutch face”, and he mentioned Sukarno’s earlier offer to have WNG under an Indonesian trusteeship. At the same time, he said they would not tolerate Dutch ideas regarding Papuan self-determination.

In a meeting with Adlai Stevenson (US Permanent Representative to the UN) a short time later, the Indonesians again attempted to create hope and fear in American minds, and therefore generate irresistible momentum in the direction of a hand-over.\(^7\) Sukarno claimed to have tried to respond to the Dutch need to salvage some pride by making a distinction between sovereignty and administration in his 17 August speech, and by suggesting that “good relations” could be restored if Indonesia was made administrator of WNG. The President said that one of his reasons was that he had been trying to avoid the possibility of “physical acts” between the Netherlands and Indonesia, and yet the Dutch had not responded to this olive branch. Thus, he thought that progress in the search for a solution could now be assisted by the US.

Parallel to American-Indonesian contact, Dutch-Australian interaction continued throughout August. On the 22nd, de Beus was given a supplementary *aide memoire* by Heydon that conveyed the additions to the earlier one as requested by Cabinet. The Ambassador commented that the document was “good”, and concurred with the Australian idea that a request for a fact-finding mission would be the best way to begin a UN initiative if the Netherlands decided to go ahead with their plans.\(^8\) Some in the DEA thought it would be better to do nothing at the UN because the Indonesians had shown

\(^7\) Telegram 239 from Jones to Rusk, 9 August 1961, in 656.9813/8-961, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
\(^7\) Telegram from Adlai Stevenson (US Permanent Representative to the UN) to the State Department, in *FRUS*, Vol. XXIII, 1961-63, ‘Southeast Asia’, pp. 429-32.
\(^8\) Conversation between de Beus and Heydon, 22 August 1961, in A1838/276, TS 3036/6/1, Pt 13, NAA. The *aide memoire* of the same date is attached.
no signs of desiring inscription, yet the Dutch determination to take the initiative was recognized. The Australians believed they could not afford to break with the Netherlands at a time when the Indonesians would be able to take full advantage of Dutch isolation, but most did not see that, in reality, Australia was by now almost completely hemmed in by growing calls for a solution and Dutch desperation to do something decisive.

VI

Within a month, Netherlands ideas had taken on a more definite form. The Australians were told the Dutch would announce in the General Assembly that the Netherlands was willing to subject itself to a UN development authority that would supervise the process towards self-determination. The Dutch also again proposed to continue to provide much of the finances needed for ongoing development. These ideas would not be voted on immediately. Rather, the Assembly could despatch a commission to assess the viability of a development authority, establish target dates for a plebiscite in WNG, and make further suggestions. Menzies at this stage reiterated that Australia had had “serious doubts” about the efficacy of taking an initiative in the UN in 1961, but he said Australia would like to “help to ensure the success of your initiative and forestall attempts to divert it into undesirable directions.” The Australians were thus committed almost by default, and now they were determined to do everything in their power to ensure that the Netherlands submission was not converted by others into a vehicle for transfer to Indonesia.

The events of the 16th Session of the UN General Assembly in many ways mirrored the twists and turns of US policy. Certainly, it was in New York that the Americans became irrevocably involved in the WNG problem. Luns presented the Netherlands plans on 26 September. The Australians responded by ordering their posts to “support the general approach” of the Dutch, while not specifically lobbying for it. The US reaction was predictably more equivocal. In response to pressure for support, Tyler told van Roijen that though the Dutch had taken “imaginative and potentially far reaching steps”, Indonesia would probably oppose these; therefore the US had to

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81 See a later letter by Hamilton to Blakeney, 28 September 1960, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 43, NAA.
82 Cablegram 1121 from Plimsoll, 22 September 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 49, NAA.
83 Cablegram 593 from Canberra to Plimsoll, 25 September 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 49, NAA.
84 For example, see Menzies suggestions in loc.cit. that the development authority be supplementary to Netherlands administration, rather than instead of it, and that the commission be restricted to examining possibilities for a development authority.
85 Circular cablegram 128 from Canberra, 28 September 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 50, NAA.
maintain a “flexible position”. More specifically, the State Department seems to have been waiting to see whether the Dutch proposal had significant international support before it was willing to try to utilize the plan as a means attaining compromise.

Before officials in Washington had had a chance to make an assessment on this issue, Stevenson cabled Rusk with a new idea. Perhaps realizing that drift in New York would simply produce another session in which Indonesia and the Netherlands adopted irreconcilable positions, the US delegation had decided the Americans and the British could talk with both parties, with the idea of drafting a resolution incorporating points that would be mutually acceptable, or at least tolerable. The resolution would call for a UN authority to run the territory until the Papuans were able to determine their own future. Indonesia would have access to the population during the intervening period. Stevenson thought the Dutch might accept a revised resolution, as it would be based on their own model. His reasons for believing the Indonesians might be persuaded to participate included the argument that, in view of their actions in the UN, it was now impossible for the Netherlands to engage in a direct transfer, and that a resolution along proposed lines would “for practical purposes assure Indonesia of acquiring WNG in [the] relatively near future.”

Rusk replied on 14 October. He said that the Department had given careful thought to the notion that the US should look to “play [a] more active middleman role” in an attempt to get the Dutch and Indonesians “closer together”. They had reached the conclusion that the Dutch were amenable to changes, especially if this would result in a sizeable majority in the General Assembly. Consequently, without making a final decision in terms of an intermediary role, it was believed that the Indonesians should be pressed to demonstrate “substantial flexibility” in order that the 16th Session would at least produce the abandonment of Dutch sovereignty. Rusk expressed regret that, so far, the Indonesians had not “budged from their insistence that their objective must be achieved in one bite”. His instructions for Jakarta set the pattern for US dealings with Indonesia for the rest of the Session:

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87 See telegram 986 from Plimpton (position and initials unidentified) to Rusk, 29 September 1961, 656.9813/9-2961, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2, and DEA cablegram 2399 from Washington, 28 September 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 50, NAA.
88 Telegram 1127 from Stevenson to Rusk, 7 October 1961, 656.9813/10-761, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
90 Rusk had evidently decided to discard Stevenson’s idea of involving the British in approaches to other countries.
The Indonesian reaction was not positive. During Jones’ initial approach, Sukarno said he had ordered Subandrio to seek a compromise solution in New York, rather than completely dismissing Netherlands’ plans, but he observed that he would only accept UN involvement as a means of transferring Irian to Indonesia. Soon after, the State Department drafted a resolution which aimed at the creation of a UN administrative authority as a “first phase”, to be followed by a “second phase” – an “act of self-determination under UN auspices”. In Rusk’s words, the resolution “carefully avoids [the] contentious question of who now has sovereignty over this territory”, the reasoning behind which was that “We see no prospect of agreement in the UN to settle this ancient and entangled juridical question, so we propose to finesse it.” Subandrio gave the Americans no encouragement when presented with the text. He said it was “unacceptable”, and that it would be “suicidal” for any Indonesian Government to accept the language embodied in it, as it failed to mention Indonesia, or identify the country with the WNG. On top of this, the Foreign Minister commented that the draft by-passed self-determination in a procedural sense, but contained the “essence” of the principle in a way Indonesia would find difficult to approve. The final Indonesian position appears to have been that they would accept a UN administration and some reference to self-determination, on the proviso that Indonesia was the sole administrator – something unacceptable to the Dutch.

The Americans had, in fact, presented the draft to the Dutch and Australians before giving it to the Indonesians. Beale and Plimsoll were handed a copy during a conversation with Rusk on 28 October, and told that the US wanted to find an uninvolved country, or group of countries, to sponsor the resolution. They were informed that the US had not ruled out the possibility that it might be one of the sponsors. In response to Plimsoll’s comment that the resolution must not be “a mere

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92 Telegram from Rusk to The Hague (419) and Jakarta (467), 1 November 1961, 656.9813/10-2761, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
93 Telegram 830 from Jones to Rusk, 3 November 1961, 656.9813/11-361, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
94 Telegram 1600 from Stevenson to Rusk, 11 November 1961, 656.9813/11-1161, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
95 Cablegram 1388 from Beale to Menzies, 28 October 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.
face-saving device for ultimate handing over to Indonesia”, the Secretary of State gave a “specific assurance” that no “side-deal” had been, or would be, made with Indonesia.

Canberra’s reaction was cautious, but not dismissive. In a message for Luns, a number of criticisms of the draft were made, including that the principle of self-determination was not sufficiently affirmed because no reference to the wishes of the people had been made.96 Also, the US resolution had specified that sovereignty would lie with the people, but that this would occur “without prejudice to the ultimate status of the territory”. The Australians thought that the deletion of these clauses in the UN, and the retention of the remainder, could be portrayed as a “victory” for the Indonesians, “and could pave the way for transfer to them.”97 They additionally believed that the General Assembly was, “strictly speaking”, not competent to decide where sovereignty should lie. Still, the cable noted that “if the United States is prepared to back this resolution in its entirety, it is important not to press minor points”. The Australians apparently held that US support for a resolution that mentioned self-determination could be crucial in turning international opinion on the dispute in favour of that principle. The American initiative seems to have been important in convincing Australian policy-makers to change from a negative defence of the Dutch draft – that is, ensuring it was not ‘hijacked’ by Indonesia and its supporters for their own ends – to an offensive based on the belief that a solution grounded on self-determination could be set in train. The Australian Cabinet also appears to have finally grasped that great momentum was being generated in the direction of a solution, and that if an effort was not made to ensure it was one based on self-determination, it would certainly be one that led to a transfer to Indonesia.

The Dutch opinion of the American draft was similar to that of the Australians – as succinctly expressed by Jan Huydecoper, the First Secretary of the Netherlands Embassy in Washington:

in general...the Dutch view was that the United States Draft was basically not too bad, subject to certain amendments, but even with these amendments would represent the irreducible minimum beyond which the Netherlands would not go...an important consideration behind the Netherlands [sic] agreement was that it was that it was very desirable to have United States support at this stage and essential to have it when the United States resolution was to be executed.98

The US were therefore in a position where one side, encouragingly, did not dismiss their ‘two-phase’ approach, but the other threatened to undo their work due to

96 Cablegram 211 from Canberra to The Hague, 31 October 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 52, NAA.
97 Emphasis original.
98 Cablegram 2694 from Washington, 31 October 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 52, NAA.
intransigence. From another angle, the Americans were faced with the dilemma created by the possibility that the Indonesians would be displeased if they went ahead, and the Dutch angry if they did not. These two aspects made for an awkward situation, and one that threatened the aim of maintaining good relations with both while bringing the antagonists closer together. Basically, the US had reached a crossroads, and their subsequent steps held important ramifications for the dispute as a whole. From within the State Department, a ‘non-radical’ line became prominent in the debate over what should be done. For example, Stevenson cabled Rusk with the suggestion that, of the alternatives now open to the US, the best was to continue looking to float or sponsor their own resolution, though with some changes to the text. Building on this idea, R. G. Cleveland (Southeast Asian desk, Far Eastern Affairs, State Department) sent a memorandum to Rusk in which he argued that if a resolution was not forthcoming the Indonesians might believe their stubbornness had been profitable, and could invoke WNG with the excuse that the UN had done nothing. On the other side, the Dutch “would have learned that the U.N. is incapable of helping them to decolonize in a principled manner.” On top of this, it would not be possible to abstain on the Dutch resolution if the US did not float its own; the Netherlands had, according to Cleveland, in essence proceeded on American recommendation, and “we would appear to be compromising our adherence to the principle of self-determination to a substantial extent”. Thus, a US resolution was seen as the obvious choice.

Meanwhile, Luns somehow found out that a critical decision was in the wind, and sent an urgent message to Menzies. He told Plimsoll that a judgement “on whether the United States would support the Netherlands resolution would be made by President Kennedy himself tonight or tomorrow”, and that if the Prime Minister wanted to send a note to Kennedy (whom Luns initially thought would be choosing the final course), “it would have to be done immediately.” The Dutch Foreign Minister’s information was perhaps not entirely correct, but it was close enough, and it had the desired affect on Menzies.

Possessing, as he did, a particular gift with the English language, the Prime Minister was able to write a fine rhetorical message for Rusk. It began with the

101 Cablegram 1543 from Plimsoll, 14 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.
102 He later said van Roijen had gained the impression that the decision “would be left to Rusk”.
103 See cablegram 1839 from Canberra, 15 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.
assertion that the “question of West New Guinea has reached a stage where decisions of fundamental and long-lasting importance may soon be taken in the United Nations General Assembly”. “The issues”, it was added, “can be simply stated”; the Netherlands, who had an “uncontested” legal title to the territory, had announced their willingness to hand sovereignty to the people, while progressively transferring administration to an international authority. Furthermore, they proposed to allow the Papuans to decide their own political future “with the completest freedom of choice” and, “even after divesting themselves of their rights”, to maintain their financial contribution to WNG. The Indonesians, on the other hand, were unwilling to challenge the Dutch in court, and obstinately stood by the political claim that transfer was needed to complete the Indonesian revolution. Using deliberately evocative language, Menzies said that the Indonesians made false claims, including accusations that the people of WNG were persecuted “and desire “anschluss” with Indonesia”, and that the Dutch had aggressive intentions.

Having begun with this overview, Menzies moved to more specific questions. He said that the Netherlands proposals represented a complete plan for settlement, so he did not feel there was any scope for concessions. Australia would accept a US resolution blurring the issue of sovereignty, as long as this did not become the launching pad for a further series of compromises. Still, the fact that Indonesia had rejected the draft meant that it might be wiser to leave the Dutch resolution untouched. This judgement, the Prime Minister asserted, was supported by “the new and alarming element” recently introduced – that of undisguised threats by Sukarno and Subandrio to resort to force if the Netherlands resolution was adopted. Rusk was told that “Such threats must make us all reconsider the wisdom of concessions to Indonesia which could now be made only under the appearance of duress”. And it was added: “I am sure you will agree that concessions under threat can never be a solid basis for stability.” Looking from a contrary, and what he intended to be a more positive, perspective, Menzies said the “Netherlands proposals are solidly based in law, and international equity”. From the Australian viewpoint the Dutch scheme already commanded a simple majority in the Assembly; thus, in conclusion, he argued that

A lead from the United States, with its great moral influence as a non-colonial power, should ensure a clear two-thirds majority which the Indonesians would hesitate to defy....Australia has a particular interest in finding for this problem an answer which would not contain the seeds of future instability. I believe that such a solution cannot be achieved unless it is based on a free expression of the will of the inhabitants themselves – whether they choose union with Indonesia, or independence, or indeed some association with the east of the island, where we are rapidly preparing the people to make a similar free choice.
In giving the message to Rusk, Beale omitted Menzies’ suggestion that the Dutch resolution be left undiluted, and based the Australian case on the US resolution instead; his reason was that the US “very definitely preferred their own version which they thought would have more chance of acceptance”.104 Rusk asked Beale to thank Menzies for his “excellent message”, and assured the Ambassador that the US resolution reflected views that were not changing. He said that they had not tabled the draft yet because they wanted to make an “impression” on the Indonesians, in order that the latter “would not bitterly oppose” it. Rusk felt that a resolution was even more important than it had been five weeks before in that the situation had been inflamed by the Netherlands proposals and Sukarno’s threats. He was concerned with the US position “if the situation on the ground worsened” because nearly everyone was looking to them as the “gendarmes of the whole world”, and there was a limit to how many problems the US could police. He thought the US could probably go “all out” and push their resolution through, but there were plenty of other problems where America had to use “maximum diplomatic effort” – and he implied the US might pull back, for the State Department believed success for the resolution was not guaranteed. Also, if the Indonesians attacked following the tabling of a US resolution, this would be a “direct challenge” to America at a time when they were truly stretched. Perhaps sensing that Rusk’s mood was dangerous to Dutch and Australian interests, Beale countered with the view that the greater risk was allowing the US or Dutch resolution to be defeated, after which Indonesia “would...feel free to move”. A sizeable majority was needed in favour of self-determination, which would deter the Republic from using force, or bring world opinion against them if they did. Such a majority, Beale urged, could only be achieved if the US backed self-determination “horse, foot, and artillery”. He went on:

we would be surprised and very disappointed if United States – whose nationhood was founded on this principle – could not stand up and be counted on. I said it seemed to me that sometimes (in understandable moments of pessimism) members of the United States Government underestimated United States influence and moral authority around the world. Now surely was the time to cash a few cheques on the United States bank of goodwill abroad.

In what made for a very strong demarche, Beale also commented “that there was an idea prevalent in some quarters that Indonesia should be given West New Guinea so that the “constructive forces in Indonesia would be released to bring the country around to the Western viewpoint”; “this view”, he argued, “seemed...to be unrealistic, if not naive.”105 Rusk encouragingly said “you have never heard me say anything like that, for I don’t

104 The conversation between Beale and Rusk may be found in cablegram 2832 from Beale to Menzies, 15 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.
105 Cablegram 2854 from Beale to Menzies, 17 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.
believe it", but at the end of the meeting Beale must have been wondering, not without some trepidation, which way the Americans would jump.

The Australian representations hit home. At a meeting a short time later, Kennedy and Rusk decided to go ahead with the US resolution.106 A. B. Emmons (Deputy Director, SW Pacific desk, Far Eastern Affairs, State Department) phoned the Australian Embassy and said the US “had come to the tentative decision it would explore ways and means of getting its resolution floated with the co-sponsorship of nations not directly parties to the dispute.”107 The US did not plan to be a sponsor, though it would “actively support...[the draft] at every stage”. Some alterations, he said, were possible, but he did not think these would be ones of substance. Beale wrote to Menzies that he had had the impression Rusk had not made up his mind by the time the Ambassador talked to him – an opinion shared by van Roijen – and had found that the “determining factor had been the “more than equal weight’ given to Australia’s general standing vis-à-vis the United States”.108

The importance of Australia in the decision is corroborated by the comment of Robert Johnson (NSC Staff) to Kennedy that it “was after a conversation with the Australian Ambassador that [Rusk]...decided we should switch from the role of intermediary to that of active sponsor of a resolution.”109 This was a highpoint in terms of Australian influence on American policy, but it was a somewhat tenuous victory. Not only were there those who believed Indonesia should be given the territory – indeed, Beale acknowledged that “with the Rostows and Bells, and the President understandably reluctant to involve the United States in any more commitments, the decision could easily have gone the other way”110 – but Rusk himself was probably motivated by more than respect for the Australians. Given the strength with which he had urged the ‘two phase’ approach, it is likely the Secretary was convinced that Dutch willingness to let go of sovereignty was too good an opportunity to be missed, in spite of Indonesia’s opposition. The US could work on Indonesia later – and hopefully the Indonesians would not react too violently – but the priority was to take the first step.

106 The existence of this meeting is not acknowledged in FRUS, and no record of it was found at A2, but Rusk had told Beale that he would be “seeing Kennedy within a few hours, when a decision would be taken whether the United States would lodge its draft resolution.” See Beale to Menzies, 15 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.
107 Cablegram 2833 from Beale to Menzies, 15 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.
108 Cablegram 2854 from Beale to Menzies, 17 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.
110 Cablegram 2854 from Beale to Menzies, 17 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.
Not all in Washington, as alluded to above, were happy with this approach. Johnson wrote to Rostow that, from the Indonesian point of view, “we have now entered the lists against them”, and he felt that the US had gone from “honest broker to advocate on the wrong side.” Johnson, who had earlier described Netherlands insistence on self-determination as a “sham”, thought they should be dissuaded from putting their resolution to the vote, and felt notions of a US resolution should be dropped also. He believed a resolution calling for talks would be better or, in case of failure, that the Dutch be encouraged to enter secret bilateral negotiations with the Indonesians. Within State, Under Secretary Bowles expressed his view that the US needed to disentangle itself from the current position:

I am disturbed by [the] impression that [the] US is being backed into [a] position of appearing to support [the] Dutch on [the] New Guinea issue....It would be deeply hurtful to our interests [in Indonesia] if [the] net result of our good-intentioned efforts [to] bring [the] disputants together was to relinquish our carefully-preserved neutrality on this issue, even though reluctantly, in favor of [the] position supported by [the] Dutch and opposed by [the] Indonesians....I believe we should seek [to] extricate ourselves by any loophole that may be left.

By this time, however, the Americans had passed the point of no return; a draft had been made and presented to a group of smaller nations. Rusk and his State Department supporters had won the day.

The proposed resolution incorporated the US idea of a commission, and the Dutch concept of a development authority. The job of the commission would be to “consider and report on arrangements for bringing the territory...under the administration of a United Nations Authority”. In deference to Indonesia, the dispute between the Netherlands and Indonesia was acknowledged, though it was said that the future of WNG should be determined by the Papuan population. The Netherlands informed Washington that these changes were the last they could accept, but the Australians were anxious to put everything behind the draft. Beale, who shared Rusk’s fear that US involvement did not guarantee the resolution’s success, wrote that “In my opinion, if we lose on this one, we may well have lost our last chance of preventing West New Guinea from going to Indonesia.”

112 Johnson to Bundy, 6 November 1961, in ibid., p. 448.
113 Robert Johnson (NSC Staff) to Rostow, 15 November 1961, in ibid., p. 457.
115 Cablegram 1583 from Plimsoll, 17 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.
117 Cablegram 1583 from Plimsoll, 17 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.
118 Cablegram 2854 from Beale to Menzies, 17 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.
The chances of losing were increased when, on 20 November, India tabled a
draft resolution calling for negotiations between the Netherlands and Indonesia. Not
only did this draft threaten to steal important votes from the Dutch and American drafts,
the principle of self-determination was excluded from the text. The Australians needed
to improvise rapidly. An urgent cable was sent to New York stating that

Our own assessments leave considerable doubt whether [the] Dutch resolution as tabled could
now be adopted...Since it is most important [sic] that a resolution confirming the applicability of
self-determination and establishing some United Nations presence should be adopted we feel that
[the] draft formulated by [the] United States should be tabled immediately. New York should do
all possible to achieve this.\(^\text{19}\)

It was even suggested that if the US resolution was not tabled, the Australian delegation
should introduce amendments to the Indian resolution in order to bring it into line with
the minimum requirements of Canberra and The Hague. The Australians would have
breathed a brief sigh of relief when the Embassy in Washington was told the next day
that three Brazzaville African countries had taken up the US resolution,\(^\text{120}\) while Luns
had said he would withdraw the Dutch draft “to enable a more generally agreed text to
be adopted.”\(^\text{121}\) Nonetheless, Australia’s troubles were not over. Up until the moment the
vote was taken, the Australians were worried that a blocking third would not be
available to counter the Indian resolution, and they continued to think of ways to amend
it in order ensure its defeat.\(^\text{122}\)

In the end, it was probably the nature of the African resolution – the final version
of which was sponsored by 13 nations – that ensured the defeat of the Indian draft. It
was basically a combination of American and Indian ideas in that it called for
negotiations on the basis of self-determination and, if these failed, for a commission to
oversee the development of the territory and an eventual act of self-determination.\(^\text{123}\)
This would have stolen a number of votes from the Indians, who finished with 41 for, 40
against, and 21 abstentions.\(^\text{124}\) The demise of the Indian scheme, which was supported
by the Indonesians, did not, however, result in a victory for the Africans, who managed 53
for (including Australia, the US, and the Netherlands), but had 41 against, with 9
abstentions. Luns had tabled the Dutch resolution for fear that the African draft would

\(^{19}\) Cablegram 790 to New York (243 to The Hague), 21 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 54, NAA.
\(^{20}\) Cablegram 2883 from Washington, 22 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.
\(^{21}\) Cablegram 1625 from Plimsoll, 22 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.
\(^{22}\) See cablegrams 798 and 818 to New York, 22 and 27 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.
\(^{23}\) For a copy of this draft, see cablegram 1653 from New York, 24 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.
\(^{24}\) The results of the vote may be found in the DEA circular of 29 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.
be attacked as being a Netherlands draft under a different guise, but he withdrew it after the defeat of the African resolution.

Outwardly, the results of the 16th Session were inconclusive. The Dutch and the Australians had failed in their bid to force a solution based on self-determination, and the Indonesians had not managed to push the Netherlands into talks that were intended to facilitate transfer — in spite of the fact these contradictory resolutions both commanded a simple majority. These appearances were deceptive. The political fallout that accompanied perceptions of failure in Washington and Jakarta soon began to have a major affect on the direction of the dispute, and the Australians again found themselves being tossed back and forth by forces that eventually became overwhelming.

VII

The consistency with which the Australian Government pursued a traditionally-styled policy in 1961, despite being repeatedly surprised by policy change in other Western capitals, is capable of misinterpretation if not placed within the context of late 1960 to early 1961. It would be possible to view Cabinet as having returned, quite inexplicably, to ignoring Indonesia and being independent from the US and UK. Of course, policy was an extension of the assessment that Australia remained an emasculated power, with a degree of increased independence limited to WNG, and circumscribed in that connection as well, yet indicators within the scope Australia’s main activities over WNG are difficult to detect. West New Guinea policy, in other words, was an uncharacteristically poor barometer of Government views on the nation’s status. What does seem obvious is that Australia’s real vulnerability to Indonesia, and dependence on the US and UK, was becoming even more pronounced than the considerable degree admitted by Cabinet. However, such a trend was not discerned by Cabinet until December. As this study focuses on Australian perceptions, and not on comparison between these and what might be interpreted by the historian as ‘reality’, analysis will follow description of the December period. Suffice to say, though, that Cabinet comprehension was accompanied by shock, and this reaction, it seems, played a significant part in the definition of SEA policy for a number of years.

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125 Cablegram 1662 from Plimsoll, 25 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.
126 DEA circular, 29 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.
Chapter 11: Sukarno’s Move and the Anglo-American Decision to Force a Dutch-Australian Capitulation, December 1961-January 1962

December 1961 proved the decisive period for the final outcome of the dispute over WNG. Events in Washington, Jakarta, and London – and also The Hague – completely changed the complexion of the dispute, and finally forced the Australians to wash their hands of the territory that they had vigilantly watched over since February 1950. The Menzies Government, following the UN vote, somewhat optimistic regarding the future of WNG, if unsure of how to exert its influence. Nonetheless, it soon dawned that to support the status quo was to stand, without hope of success because of Dutch collapse, against the will of the US and UK. Reluctantly – and momentously – Australia capitulated because of the futility of opposition, and for the sake of its relationship with its two great allies.

Pemberton has argued that events in Washington surrounding the WNG issue established a pattern of White House dominance over the State Department in the making of foreign policy.¹ In so far as this is true, it must be said that the aftermath of the 16th Session was the crucial period in this development. Hitherto, Rusk and his Department had exerted their influence over WNG policy at the expense of figures such as Rostow and Robert Johnson – as evinced in the decision to float the US resolution after it had been rejected by the Indonesians. Following the vote, the Indonesians reacted vehemently, feeling that they had been betrayed by the Americans and a number of their anti-colonial comrades. Reporting from New York, Stevenson said that he had been told by an Indonesian UN representative, Nugroho, that “Subandrio and other leaders of the Indonesian delegation…were all, including those who might be expected to moderate, exceedingly bitter about the part played in voting on WNG by [the] US”.² Nugroho added that “he was certain that there would be [a] strong wave of anti-American feeling which would take a long time to overcome.” Though Rusk felt that US efforts had been “very useful”,³ those in the White House thoroughly disagreed, and took what had probably been a long-awaited opportunity to attack the Secretary of State

² Telegram 1829 from Stevenson to Rusk, 29 November 1961, 656.9813/11-1861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63.
³ Telegram 577 from Rusk to Jakarta, 29 November 1961, 656.9813/11-1861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63.
and his Department. McGeorge Bundy (Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs) wrote to Kennedy that “most of the specialists in the area believe that the Secretary’s respect for the Australians and dislike of Sukarno has led him to take a position in the UN debate which, if continued, can only help the Communists.”

Rostow, also in a letter to Kennedy, spoke of the “UN fiasco”, and said that

It is the feeling of all of us on your staff that the Western World has got to consider this problem somewhat less in terms of the pure diplomacy of West Irian and more in terms of a common interest in frustrating communism in Indonesia....I know of no one in the town who does not believe that, soon or late, the Indonesians will get West Irian. If this is indeed the way it will go, it may be important for us to work with this trend, using it for the common benefit, rather than permitting the Communists to continue to exploit this issue to press Indonesia closer to the Communist Bloc externally and towards Communism internally....A final word. We must move fast...both the Dutch and the Indonesians may do things which will quickly heighten tensions. In fact, as of today, they have both started down that track.5

In a specific sense, Rostow implied that pushing the Dutch to negotiate would be the best option. Johnson added his voice to this idea, and went as far as suggesting Luns be pressured to eliminate the condition of self-determination that he had set for the initiation of talks with Indonesia.6 Both believed that Australia should be persuaded that its long-term interests lay in preventing Indonesia from falling to communism, rather than simply keeping Indonesia out of WNG.

It is difficult to determine exactly what the State Department was doing at this time. Rusk appears to have met with the President on 1 December, but apparently no record of the conversation was made. Similarly, internal correspondence on the matter is not easy to find. In spite of this lack of material, there are indications Rusk believed that while the ‘two-phase’ approach had failed in a strict sense, it had contributed to developments that could now be built upon. There was, he wrote, now “clear evidence that [the] Dutch wish to disengage from WNG at [the] earliest time possible”7 – something he thought reassured the Indonesians – and he made it clear to Jones that he did not feel the Department had “compromised...[its] potential for continuing [to] assist parties [to] reach [a] peaceful and acceptable settlement.” In other words, activities in the UN resulted in some important ground work that could now be built upon through non-biased US assistance.

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6 Johnson to Kennedy, 30 November 1961, in ibid., p. 468.
7 Telegram 577 from Rusk to Jakarta, 29 November 1961, 656.9813/11-1861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63.
Kennedy seems not to sided immediately with either his own staff or that of the State Department, for an obviously unresolved debate was still occurring on 8 December. Indeed, it was not until the momentum generated by events in Indonesia was felt that US policy was moved in a particular direction. Elsewhere, Australian policy had returned to a reactive state. The campaign in the UN had been aimed at stimulating the growth of international support in favour of self-determination, but with the failure to get a two-thirds majority, the initiative was taken from Australia’s hands.

As R. L. Harry (First Assistant Secretary, DEA) commented to de Beus:

it was a pity that we had not got the approval of the Assembly to proceed with a definite course of action. The United States had voted for the resolution, which was useful support for the principle of self-determination. On the other hand the vote had not been clear cut enough to prevent the Indonesians from maintaining pressure activities.

Talking to de Beus a day later, Tange made it clear that the Australians realized new factors had come into play with the conclusion of the 16th Session, but revealed that their policy was to simply watch and wait:

although the U.N. debate had been deadlocked, a number of new and important ideas had been floated which might well generate further initiatives. The situation now was clearly not the situation existing before the Dutch and U.S. proposals were made. We and others therefore attached considerable importance to reactions to the U.N. debate of the Netherlands, Indonesian and United States Governments.

At first, Australian representatives were apparently cautiously optimistic that something positive might come from the UN debate. At the end of November, Beale cabled Menzies and conveyed his extraordinary judgement that Bundy was "sympathetic" to the Australian viewpoint, and "would be likely to favour our point of view" in talks with the President. Beale similarly thought that the attitude towards Australia in the State Department was favourable, and he recommended that this generally advantageous atmosphere be exploited through indications of the way the Menzies Government wanted the US to move in the wake of the Assembly debate. Confirming that policy was to wait, the Prime Minister replied that Australia’s "first priority" was a "firm assessment of the situation" after the last Session, and this was dependent on further clarification of the Indonesian and Dutch attitude. Still, he echoed Beale’s positive outlook by asking him to thank the US for their strong support in New York, and by commenting that "It seems to us that, as a result of the Assembly

9 Conversation between Harry and de Beus, 5 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.
10 Conversation between Tange and de Beus, 6 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.
11 Cablegram 2951 from Beale to Menzies, 29 November 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.
12 Cablegram 2007 from Menzies to Beale, 8 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 55, NAA.
debate, there is a greater realisation than formerly of the direct interest of the Papuans themselves in their future.”

As officials in Canberra waited benignly, and those in Washington were groping around rather ineffectively, Sukarno made a decisive move. In a speech to the Indonesian Army Staff College on 30 November, he had said that the “present moment is the proper time” for settling the WNG problem, adding that he would “issue orders soon about the liberation”.13 This contributed to an atmosphere of heightened tension that provided an ideal setting for his major ploy. On 8 December, Sukarno told Ambassador Jones that

he was “deeply disappointed”, indeed his hope and faith in [the] US had been “shattered” as a result of our abandonment of our historic policy of neutrality...we had not only failed to help Indonesia, we had actively campaigned against [the] Indonesian position and supported [the] Dutch right down the line.14

Rejecting Jones’ protestations that the US had tried to be objective, Sukarno continued:

My people are pushing me to give the command...force was the only language the Dutch understood...we don’t have much time. I am holding a meeting on Monday (December 11) with the heads of our military services. I need to know something by then. Specifically, what does the United States intend to do...Let the United States abandon its policy of tightrope walking on this issue...it is time for America to make its voice heard, to take a firm stand to talk to the Dutch. That is my suggestion.

Jones’ interpretation of the President’s comments added to their weight. He began by stressing that while Indonesia’s military leaders would do their best to stop Sukarno from “giving the command” at the meeting, they all admitted they had little choice but to toe the line if he did so.15 As a consequence, Jones said he was “convinced there is a grave and imminent danger of some form of military action by Indonesia aimed at either outright conquest or creation of [a] situation which would force international action to restore peace...[and] advance recognition [of] GOI claims”. The Ambassador observed that although Sukarno was “of course, a consummate actor....his demeanor was wholly compatible with sincerity”; it would therefore “be unsafe to assume he was bluffing”. He said he realized the President was applying “all the pressure at his command to get us back to specifics”, but he believed that if the US took a hard-line stance because they did not want to give in to pressure, “we must be prepared to face [the] probability of military action.” He went on:

14 Telegram 1018 from Jones to Rusk, 8 December 1961, 656.9813/12-861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63.
15 Telegram 1022 from Jones to Rusk, 8 December 1961, 656.9813/12-861, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63.
On the other hand, we can yet save the situation...what we must have immediately is a message...from President Kennedy to President Sukarno. To be effective, it must contain something specific to give Sukarno hope that a political solution of this question is still possible in the near future. To have an impact on Monday's peace or war meeting at Sukarno's palace, I will need a message not later than Sunday, December 10.

Jones' messages had a critical impact in Washington. A general willingness to believe that the Ambassador's assessment was correct enabled the more radically-minded White House staff to gain the ascendancy over the State Department. The key figure in this switch was President Kennedy. Previously reticent to use his influence at Rusk's expense, Kennedy approved two cables to Jones – one of which was a letter to Sukarno – which Bundy described as moving "towards [the] views of Rostow and others who have been critical of our UN position." 16 The first telegram contained instructions for Jones to be delivered concurrent to the delivery of the President's letter. 17 It contained three main points, the opening one of which set out the means by which Sukarno should be persuaded that the use of force was counter-productive. Preventing a 'boil-over' was central to the US strategy at this point – for such a situation was viewed as disastrous from an American perspective – but the US was, at the same time, careful not to suggest their opposition would in any way be military. The second point dealt with arguments in defence of the 'two-phase' position assumed by the US in the UN, and implied the Indonesians should think of accepting a Dutch withdrawal followed by a period of UN administration during which Jakarta would have access to WNG (and therefore be able to influence the outcome of an act of self-determination). Significantly, it was commented that the US impression was that the WNG problem was "primarily a question [of] finding a face-saving device so [the] Dutch can get out". Nonetheless, as long as Indonesia insisted on being the sole administrator of WNG, neither the Dutch or the Australians would be willing to retreat. The final, and perhaps most important point, had to do with the United States' future role in the problem. It was here that the influence of Rostow and his supporters was most evident. Jones was to tell Sukarno that the US "would be prepared to play a behind the scenes role in order [to] help bring about [an] amicable solution." Two notable aspects of this process were spelt out. Firstly, it was made clear that pressure would be exerted on the Netherlands to pursue such a solution; the Indonesians were to be told "we [are] prepared [to] explore with [the] Dutch what first steps might be

17 For these instructions, see Rusk to Jakarta, 9 December 1961, in ibid., pp. 474-77.
feasible to this end". Secondly, by saying they were "encouraged" by the recently expressed Indonesian hope for a US role in the initiation of bilateral talks, the Americans implied they had given in to the Indonesian demand for discussions of this kind. The penultimate paragraph of the communication to Jones highlighted the nature of the bargain the US were doing with Sukarno, and the gloomy prospects that this carried for the Dutch and Australians:

In summary you should seek to persuade Sukarno that if he does not give a signal for force on Monday, we can and will intensify our efforts with [the] Dutch and with [the] Australians and will hope to be able to indicate significant progress to him as these efforts proceed.

Kennedy's letter to Sukarno covered similar points to those contained in the telegram to Jones. He said that from the US viewpoint, the period in the UN had "narrowed the gap" between the Dutch and the Indonesians, and he thought a "definitive action" resulting in a Netherlands withdrawal, and a "greatly enlarged opportunity" for Indonesian influence on WNG's future, was now a "wholly realistic prospect." On the lines of the US part in a solution, Kennedy remarked that "we are quite ready to play whatever role you and the Dutch think would be useful", though, in the context of expressing his hope that an attack would be avoided, he warned that "the use of force would make it very difficult for me to be as helpful as I would like to be in working out a satisfactory resolution on this matter." Kennedy and his advisers were indeed desperate to divert Sukarno from war, yet these admonitions were far from reflecting the spirit of assurances of logistic support as given to the Dutch by Dulles. If the crisis of early December revealed anything, it was that the US had almost reached their limit for extending help to the Netherlands in its time of need, and that the Americans were prepared to go a little further for an equally desperate Indonesia.

In a dramatic moment befitting the entire episode, Jones drove to Bogor at night after receiving the messages from Washington, and confronted an "irritable" Sukarno, who was by then in his pyjamas. Jones covered all the points in his instructional cable, despite being "constantly interrupted with emotional outbursts against the Dutch". Much of the discussion seems to have involved attempts to convince an apparently volatile Sukarno that the use of force was unwise. The Ambassador believed that when he "first saw Sukarno, he was rarin-tearin to go", but he felt that Kennedy's letter had brought him back to earth for the moment, and that Sukarno had made it obvious

18 For this letter, see Rusk to Jakarta, 9 December 1961, in ibid., pp. 477-78.
military moves would be postponed “pending [the] promised US initiatives”. Again reinforcing an impression Sukarno would have wanted to portray, Jones wrote that the “important thing is that we press vigorously for [a] settlement while this period of relative calm lasts.”

Apart from creating the understanding that it was only the US demarche that had “saved the day”, Sukarno maintained the threat of attack by failing to reveal what exactly he would say to a mass rally that would, in his words, take place “to demand that I give them the order to march on West Irian.” Foreign representatives were apparently told that the result of Sukarno’s war or peace meeting was that Sukarno would issue a “final command” on 19 December. Officials in Washington thus believed they were under continued pressure to demonstrate that they were taking action. On 11 December, Dutch, Australian, and British representatives were briefed, and told the US “took a very serious view of the situation”. They were also asked to give suggestions as to the alternatives now open regarding the WNG problem. Two days later, Acting Secretary of State George Ball sent a telegram to Rusk reiterating the urgency of moving to forestall a catastrophe:

[the] content of [the] Sukarno speech to [the] WNG rally now scheduled [for] Dec 19 might be influenced in a less aggressive direction if Sukarno, prior [to the] speech, can see specific evidence that meaningful movement [is] possible in [the] very near future...[the] President’s message to Sukarno appears to have somewhat allayed [the] imminent crisis but strong tension continues and we believe constructive steps on [the] Dutch part [are] urgent....We have carefully weighted [the] importance [of] this issue with all other matters you are confronted with and reluctantly conclude that it is desirable [to] take advantage [of] your presence [in] Paris [to] discuss possible future steps to resolve [the] WNG dispute with Luns who plays [the] dominant role [in] Dutch policy. Hopefully we could have positive initial Dutch reaction to convey [to] Sukarno prior [to the] December 19 mass meeting for [the] purpose of convincing him [to] moderate his public stance [on] this problem or, at least, avoid irrevocable aggressive steps...You may wish to reemphasize our concern over [the] latest development [in] Indonesia...and sound out Luns on [the] possibility of direct talks without preconditions with [the] Indonesians.

In the event, Rusk appears not to have talked to Luns along these lines – having discussed WNG with him earlier in the day – but the desire to push quickly towards a solution is clear enough.

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20 This was Jones’ opinion. See telegram 1025 from Jones to Rusk, 11 December 1961, 656.9813/12-1161, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63.
22 For reference to this “command”, see telegram 813 from Fry to FO, 14 December 1961, in FO 371/160008.
24 Telegram from George Ball (Acting Secretary of State) to Rusk, 13 December 1961, in ibid., p. 485.
25 See footnote No. 3, in loc.cit.
Soon afterward the State Department surrendered to the White House staff view that WNG must go to Indonesia. In a memorandum for Bundy, State Department Executive Secretary Lucias D. Battle wrote:

> we recognise that for historical, geographical and political reasons West New Guinea probably will tend to closer if not complete association with Indonesia and our role in seeking a settlement will be to facilitate this evolution. We are in effect committed by the President’s letter to assist in efforts to find a solution in a framework that would allow the Indonesians every opportunity to achieve their objective peacefully and without undue delay. 26

Previously, the position favoured by Rusk and the bulk of his officers had been that the US should push hard for a solution, but avoid favouring a settlement that represented the core of either Dutch or Indonesian thinking. By 17 December, however, there were no internal hindrances to US pressure for an outcome on Jakarta’s terms.

The Australians believed the Americans had over-reacted. When told of the crisis in Jakarta over the weekend, Beale told Averell Harriman (Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs) that “we had lived with this thing for a long time and that Sukarno had made such threats many times before and there was no reason to assume that this time was the time.” 27 Revealing his scepticism over the US response, Beale commented to Menzies that “Ambassador Jones...however, seems to have got excited and found willing listeners here.” This was perhaps the beginning of a realization in Australian circles that their optimism was misplaced. Adding to his account of events in Jakarta, Harriman told Beale that the Dutch should not assume that UN deliberations had settled the issue – “the emergency continues” – and that the US hoped bilateral talks would eventuate. He said he could envisage “a “two-bite” operation”, the first of which would involve the Dutch removing themselves from WNG and access to the Papuan population being given to the Indonesians. 28 The second bite would occur with a plebiscite from which the Indonesians “might reasonably hope to secure West New Guinea if they behaved well”. Beale remarked on the “developing interest amongst the Papuans themselves”, to which Harriman made noises that Australia’s interests were appreciated, and views sought, but the Ambassador reported to Menzies that the interview “has left me with some feeling of disquiet”. Beale said he suspected Harriman thought a hand-over “might not be such a bad thing”, and that – in spite of his agreement with Australia’s attitude and the idea that self-determination was “the rock to

26 Lucias D. Battle (State Department Executive Secretary) to Bundy, undated, in ibid., p. 489. The State Department copy of this paper is dated 17 December 1961, and it is clear that it received the support of previously warring factions within State. See the footer on p. 486.

27 Cablegram 3046 from Beale to Menzies, 11 December 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.

28 This, and information in the rest of the passage, comes from cablegram 3059 from Beale to Menzies, 11 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 56, NAA.
stand upon" – "the need to settle the problem somehow is in the front of his mind at all times."

During the interview, Beale was informed Rusk had spoken to Lord Home, the British Foreign Secretary, and told that the US hoped the UK would work to bring the Dutch and Indonesians together. The notion of bilateral negotiations had, in fact, been popular in the Foreign Office for some time. The concept of a Melanesian Federation that had prevailed early in the year came to be seen as impractical unless some interim measure could be found. The FO therefore became interested in pushing for a solution that would be acceptable to both the Dutch and Indonesians, and yet at least contained the possibility of enabling the development of a Papuan state at a later stage. These desires spawned various proposals, but they were proposals that also began to show the influence of other factors. With the advent of the Dutch policy of 'internationalization', and clear US interest in a solution, opinion in the FO began to stress more strongly the importance of finding a way out, while expressing a belief that this could only be achieved through bilateral negotiations. The central reason why the British were keen on the American resolution was that it met their "main requirement" that it be "as unprovocative as possible and need not, therefore, lead to an embittered debate calculated to prejudice subsequent negotiations". When the issue came to a vote, the rationale for going with the African resolution had been the same.

The Indonesian reaction to the aftermath of the 16th Session alarmed the British. Early in the month, J. E. Cable (Assistant, SEA Department, FO) thought Sukarno might "conceivably calculate that an attack...might bring him important political dividends", and E. Surper (FO) minuted that "Soekarno is quite mad enough to attack and has a badly swollen head at the moment." In the period following Sukarno's war or peace meeting, and prior to his 19 December speech, officials in London appear to have panicked. It was here that their policy on negotiations moved from quiet suggestion amongst allies, to active advocacy on a wider scale. In spite of Harriman's

29 Emphasis original.
30 loc.cit.
31 FO memorandum for the Cabinet Official Committee on the South Pacific, Undated (though almost certainly drafted in late July 1961), in FO 371/15997, PRO.
32 See, for example, loc.cit., and minute by E. H. Peck (Superintending Under-Secretary, SEA Department, FO), 17 August 1961, in FO 371/159998, PRO.
33 See Lord Home (British Foreign Secretary) to C. A. Carey-Foster (Counsellor, British Embassy, The Hague), 30 August 1961, in FO 371/159998, PRO.
34 Peck to R. T. Ledward (Counsellor, British Embassy, Washington), 15 November 1961, in FO 371/160003, PRO.
35 Minutes by J. E. Cable (Assistant, SEA Department, FO), 2 December 1961, and E. Surper (position unidentified), 4 December 1961, in FO 371/160008, PRO.
comment regarding the US hope that the UK would initiate something designed to bring the Dutch and Indonesians together, the Americans do not seem to have suggested that the British do this. It would hardly have been necessary. In a telegram of 14 December from London to the Embassy in Washington, it was clear the British policy on WNG was turning:

We fear that President Sukarno may be intending to issue an ultimatum to the Dutch on December 19. Even if this ultimatum allows a period of months for the Dutch to negotiate the transfer of sovereignty before the Indonesians resort to force, we consider the Dutch will refuse to negotiate under duress. This might finally close the door on a negotiated settlement and make the outbreak of hostilities almost inevitable. As such hostilities would do irreparable damage to western [sic] interests in South East Asia, we think a last attempt should be made to persuade President Sukarno to leave an acceptable loop-hole for negotiations in his statement on December 19. Merely to urge moderation would, however, be useless. We must offer him a definite bargain.36

It was proposed that the US and British Ambassadors – and, if possible, Shaw as well – approach Sukarno and tell him of their anxieties regarding Indonesia’s threats, and their fear that an ultimatum would preclude negotiations. The President was then to be advised:

We could not urge the Dutch to negotiate under duress. On the other hand, if the Indonesian statement on December 19 is moderately worded and leaves a real loop-hole, the United States and British Governments will, in return, do their best to get the Dutch to come to the conference table in a reasonable frame of mind always on the understanding that the Indonesians would be similarly reasonable.

Menzies was given an aide memoire on 15 December expressing the British proposition in the same terms, and asking if Australia wanted to be part of a joint Anglo-American approach to Sukarno. The Prime Minister sent a lengthy personal reply the following day.37 In it, he acknowledged that they were faced with “a situation in which the risks have to be calculated carefully”, and said he understood British anxieties, but he was critical on a number of points. The first was that he thought the British proposal assumed the Indonesians would “launch a serious attack unless suitably placated”. Intelligence available to the Australians suggested that any attack would be “token” at most, and would be geared to producing UN calls for a cease fire. Furthermore, he believed deterrent pressure would be more effective in preventing force than would reacting with alarm. Menzies then moved to the heart of the Australian position, which was – for the first time since the Bevin era – beginning to appear to be fundamentally at odds with the British stance. He explained that, as far as the

36 Telegram 9448 to Washington, 14 December 1961, in FO 371/160009, PRO.
37 For a copy of this message see cablegram 3940 to London (2056 to Beale, 271 to McCarthy), 16 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 56, NAA.
Australians were aware, the Indonesian concept of negotiations “meant only negotiations about the terms and conditions of transfer.” Thus, “Anglo-United States pressure on the Dutch to negotiate could well be taken by the Indonesians as implying a concession of their claim to sovereignty”. By implication, Menzies was reiterating the long-held opinion of his Government that the Indonesian claim was entirely illegitimate, and should be given no recognition whatsoever. Typically, he moved from here to self-determination. He wrote that the Dutch proposal in the UN included “very substantial concessions and went as far towards meeting the Indonesian position as would be consistent with the principles of the Charter.” Though it promised a change in sovereignty, this was to be one that favoured the inhabitants of WNG – “It emphasised, as we have always emphasised, the over-riding importance of the principle of self-determination for those people.” The Indonesians, he continued, “have made not the slightest move” towards this principle. He therefore added:

If you and the United States pursue a course which even appears to set self-determination aside, the Indonesians will be confirmed in their rigid attitude. The problem will then be soluble only by an outright Dutch capitulation, which would sacrifice the rights of the inhabitants, or by the very Indonesian violence that we are all anxious to avoid.

Menzies made it clear he did not rule out the possibility of negotiations, but these would have to be “free from threat and on a previously agreed basis of self-determination”. If pursued seriously, he thought this could result in arrangements under which “undiluted and unrestricted freedom of choice” could be combined with an opportunity for Jakarta to influence such a choice in their own direction. Menzies thought a just solution might be achieved in this way, but stressed that the Indonesians would have to accept the principle of self-determination at the outset.

Returning to the immediate issue, Menzies concluded the main part of his message on a tough note. Failing to offer Australia’s support for the proposed initiative, he said that:

If you and the Americans feel constrained to make some approach to Sukarno, I wish you would consider telling him frankly the unwisdom of his present tactics. He and his Ministers need to be persuaded that his threats of force are likely to reduce the opportunities for a negotiated settlement and drive the foreign policy of Indonesia in direction [sic] dangerous for the country’s future.

Menzies explained in his communication that he had not consulted Cabinet – as Ministers were scattered around Australia – but would immediately instruct the British if they wanted to change what he had said. When they met on 19 December, Cabinet
whole-heartedly endorsed the Prime Minister’s hard line.\textsuperscript{38} It was consequently clear that although no firm expression of Australian WNG policy was given in the wake of the vote in the General Assembly, uncertainty concerned tactical questions and not those of substance.

An attempt to soothe Australian fears through a note from the UK High Commission on 17 December probably served to increase them.\textsuperscript{39} In it, concern was expressed that the Australians might think “the British Government are aiming to put pressure on the Dutch to hand over West New Guinea without self-determination”. This intention was denied with the claim that it had “always been felt that the right course was to aim at the Indonesians and the Dutch meeting for peaceful negotiations and that is all [we] are concerned with at the moment.” The next step would be to talk to The Hague about what solution would be acceptable (within the bounds of self-determination). The problem for the Australians was that, as Menzies had pointed out, negotiations on the basis of the current Indonesian position would result in a transfer. Thus, the idea that the British were exclusively focussing on initiating immediate discussions was hardly reassuring.

The reality of the developing split between the UK and Australia was demonstrated by the British decision to go ahead with an approach to Sukarno. They were not accompanied by the Americans, for the latter believed they had done enough with the Indonesians in the interim.\textsuperscript{40} Convinced that Britain’s commitment to help the Dutch in the case of conflict meant that they had an even greater need to dissuade Sukarno than the US, the Foreign Office instructed Ambassador Fry to approach the President if he felt that an ultimatum would be issued.\textsuperscript{41} After consulting Jones, Fry replied that Sukarno was likely to order Indonesia to enter a final state of “confrontation of the Dutch” rather than order an attack. Still, both he and Jones thought a word to the President might “have some effect” in view of the fact that “Her Majesty’s Government are universally regarded here as committed to supporting the Dutch through thick and thin”.\textsuperscript{42} Unable to get to Sukarno before his speech, he conveyed the British message to Subandrio, who later told him that the President was “most appreciative”.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{38} Decision No. 1689, 19 December 1961, Cabinet meeting, Canberra, in A4943, Vol. 5. See A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 56, NAA, for a draft of this message. The original does not appear to exist in DEA files.
\textsuperscript{39} Note from the British High Commission, 17 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 56, NAA.
\textsuperscript{40} See Rusk’s views in minute by Warner, 15 December 1961, in FO 371/160009, PRO.
\textsuperscript{41} Telegram 852 to Jakarta, 16 December 1961, in FO 371/160009, PRO.
\textsuperscript{42} Telegram 829 from Sir Leslie Fry (British Ambassador, Jakarta), 18 December 1961, in FO 371/160009, PRO.
\textsuperscript{43} Telegram 836 from Fry, 20 December 1961, in FO 371/160009, PRO.
On 19 December, with the British and Americans moving in the direction he intended, Sukarno left the door open to negotiations. As an official of the FO put it, "the President's long awaited final command turned out to be no more than the order to await the final command." The speech itself, however, had ceased to be the immediate concern for the Americans. Following Kennedy's message to Sukarno, a general feeling in Washington was that they could be confident an invasion would not be announced from the podium in Jogjakarta, but the period of grace was limited and dependent upon America's ability to show that a solution was nearing. Sukarno himself reminded them of this state of affairs when he wrote to Kennedy on 17 December saying that Indonesians were at "boiling point", and that there would be no alternative to force if the Dutch continued to push for an independent Papua. It was therefore imperative to move the Dutch towards the negotiating table. In spite of losing influence after 8 December, the State Department apparently managed to steer US policy in a direction that avoided openly forcing the Dutch to capitulate. They sought to encourage the Dutch to make decisions that the US deemed inevitable anyway. As in the General Assembly, aspects of the Netherlands position were encouraging to the Americans, yet there were others that were a cause for concern. On 14 December, van Roijen told representatives of the State Department that while the Dutch Government had, in backing the African resolution, agreed to talks, they would not speak with the Indonesians on the basis of a transfer. The Dutch continued to insist that a precondition of any talks was that the people of WNG be given the right to self-determination. The next day, the Dutch Ambassador laid down another condition, stressing that his Government "could agree to negotiations with the Indonesians if they were placed in an international framework"; the Netherlands felt that past experience demonstrated a solution could not be found in a bilateral context.

Knowing the Indonesians would not accept a conference based on self-determination, but might agree to the presence of a third party, the State Department left the second condition for the moment, and focussed on convincing the Dutch to drop the first. In talks on 19 and 20 December, Harriman pushed the Netherlands to take

44 H. A. Staples (position unidentified) was paraphrasing a comment in the Manchester Guardian. See minute by Staples, 21 December 1961, in FO 35/160009, PRO.
46 Conversation between van Roijen and representatives of the State Department, 14 December 1961, in 756C. 00/12-1461, box 1837, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
47 The record of a conversation between Ledward, Robert S. Lindquist (Officer in Charge of Indonesian Affairs, Office of SW Pacific Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Department), and Arthur B. Emmons III (Deputy Director, Office of SW Pacific Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State
advantage of the present opportunity for a settlement.\textsuperscript{48} He said that Kennedy had instructed that the US role should be “one of assisting in establishing the procedure and framework under which talks would take place.”\textsuperscript{49} Specifically, “he urged that the Dutch put aside...[the self-determination] pre-condition as a principal point.” On 22 December van Roijen told Harriman that his Government had decided to drop this requirement, but they “would...of course, stick to the principle of self-determination in negotiations”.\textsuperscript{50} There was some division in the Dutch Cabinet over the question of pre-conditions,\textsuperscript{51} and it is possible that the Indian invasion of Goa on 19 December – which was widely interpreted as setting a dangerous precedent that Sukarno would be tempted to follow – tipped the balance against the hard-liners.\textsuperscript{52} The Dutch were not in a position to risk a war, so they removed the immediate barrier to negotiations. They had not, on the other hand, given away their stubborn insistence on self-determination, and acquiesced in a ‘face-saving device’. As a member of the Dutch Foreign Ministry told the Australians, “some members of Cabinet felt more strongly on the question of prior conditions than...some othere [sic]”, but he added, “with considerable emphasis”, that “not one in Cabinet...would entertain the idea of any “sham” negotiations or “enter into a shabby deal”.\textsuperscript{53}

Though conflict over the issue of self-determination remained between the Netherlands and Indonesia, the Americans would have been satisfied that they had at least opened the way to negotiations. They were, nevertheless, apparently having problems softening the Australian position. On 18 December, Beale responded to Harriman’s request of 11 December for Australia’s views. Repeating many of the arguments employed in Menzies’ reply of the 16\textsuperscript{th} to the British, Beale said that Sukarno was “bluffing in order to obtain maximum concessions”. The thing to do, he continued, was to make it plain that if an attack occurred, the “US [and] Australia and other interested parties would be on [the] other side of [the] fence.” Having said this,
Beale thought the Indonesians would at most attempt a “limited beachhead”. If this occurred he said “Sukarno must understand [the] grave consequences [of] such action.”

Moving to the moral justification for the Australian position, Beale asserted that the “only tolerable stand for [the US] and Australia...is to insist, since [the] Dutch [are] willing to leave[,]...that genuine self-determination be exercised”. In conclusion, Beale added that the views he had expressed represented “national opinion”, and were thus unlikely to change substantially even if a new Government came to power in Canberra.

Harriman’s rejoinder was not what Beale would have hoped for. Harriman contradicted the Australian military assessment by saying that the “situation [was] more critical than in [the] past”, and he remarked that Sukarno was in an increasingly difficult situation, which meant he needed an indication that a political solution was possible, otherwise he would give serious consideration to the use of force.

Moving on, the Assistant Secretary intimated that the Australian Government “might consider long-range developments in [the] area and, since good relations with Indonesia [are] vital to Australia, reassess [the] validity [of a] position which might inevitably bring Australia and Indonesia into strong and lasting disagreement.” Given that all he had said was negative from an Australian perspective, Harriman assured Beale that the US took a “most sober view of Australian security requirements”. This said, he returned to the offensive. Reacting to the Ambassador’s pleas for an indication that the US would push for self-determination, he remarked that although the Americans were committed to the concept in principle, “application among primitive people [is] apt to be influenced by many factors”. The US, he remarked, could not give any guarantee to Australia in the absence of a foundation upon which to build a definite plan for self-determination.

Not surprisingly, Beale sent a gloomy report of the conversation back to Canberra. He said he was “reinforced in the disquiet” he had felt on 11 December regarding the US position. Additionally, he felt that supplementary comments given at the time by J. M. Steeves (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs) – who had said the US differed fundamentally from Australia in that they were convinced Sukarno would get WNG, and that self-determination for the Papuans would be a farce – “reflect a widely held view in the State Department”. Two days later, Beale expanded on his interpretation of the American position in an important cable to Menzies.

54 Telegram 300 from the State Department to Canberra, 20 December 1961, 656.9813/12-2061, box 1353, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.

55 Cablegram 3136 from Beale to Menzies, 19 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 56, NAA.

56 Cablegram 3163 from Beale to Menzies, 21 December 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.
to the heart of US motives, he said that "no-one likes Sukarno’s tactics", but the problem was "regarded as a dangerous one which, whether it continues as it is or erupts into an attack, can only benefit the Communists." Having said this, Beale stressed that an attack "will involve the United States in some very difficult decisions they don’t want to have to face." On the question of self-determination, the Ambassador believed Harriman and Steeves were not alone in thinking that the idea was a "gimmick" in the case of New Guinea. Indeed, Beale thought the main factor that had held the US from "bringing more heavy pressure to bear on the Dutch, and even perhaps taking up a public position more favourable to Indonesia" was their "regard for Australia and their reluctance to take a stand or a course of action contrary to what we regard as vital to our interests."57 Reiterating, Beale said the stand taken by the US at the UN in favour of self-determination was largely "in deference to our ideas but", he continued,

I think this was their high water mark. Indications are that from now on their attitude is far more likely to deteriorate than otherwise....I think the United States will continue to use its influence to bring about a settlement at all costs.

In considering the options available to Australia within the context of the various possible developments in the dispute, Beale noted, firstly, that if there was an attack, he assumed Australia would denounce such action, make a stand on self-determination, and actively back the Netherlands in the UN. This would, nonetheless, not be a favourable development in Beale’s eyes; he told Menzies he would have "considerable anxiety" regarding any outcome of UN discussion in such circumstances. He thus implied that Australia should strenuously seek to avoid a problem of this kind. In the absence of an attack, Beale thought that if the Dutch stood by self-determination "we may perhaps continue with our posture for some time". This aside, he posed the question of what Australia should do "if, as a result of pressure from the United States, Britain, and within Holland, the Dutch decide to make a bilateral arrangement with Indonesia, the final result of which is to give the latter the territory without real self-determination". The following passage contained the thrust of Beale’s message, and it demonstrated that the Ambassador saw Australian WNG policy as being in need of change:

I confess to some anxiety lest Australia should be placed in a false position at some point along this line, and I am wondering whether we should not get prepared, if necessary, to "roll with the punch"; i.e. accept the result with the best possible grace when the time came, before it was too late. This would be a matter of timing. So long as the Dutch stand firm we should continue to support them on principle, but if they weaken we ought to avoid being left in the position of

57 Emphasis original.
appearing to be intransigent and the only remaining opposition to settlement. If we did let this happen we should attract the resentment not only of Indonesians, but of many other Asians as well. Therefore, should the moment come, we should accept what is agreed to between the Dutch and Indonesians, but should even appear to be generous by offering our own co-operation and assistance to Indonesia in their efforts to advance the welfare of the Papuan people, etc. etc. etc. I do not at all accept the argument that rolling with the punch in this way would make the Indonesians love us; my only point is that there would be little to be gained in arousing Asian resentment after it became apparent that we were not going to win anyhow.  

Given following events, it appears the interview with Harriman, Beale’s assessment of American policy, and the nature of his policy recommendations, were crucial in beginning to undermine Australian morale. Combined with further body blows to the Liberal Government’s position, the realizations produced by these occurrences were, in the end, decisive.  

It was not long before the Australians received further evil omens. On 22 December it became clear that New Zealand – always a staunch supporter of the Dutch-Australian position – had abandoned their friends across the Tasman. External Affairs was handed a copy of a message from the Prime Minister of NZ, Sir K. J. Holyoake, to Sukarno. It read:  

New Zealand does not approach the problem of West New Guinea in any narrow or partisan spirit; our sole concern is that there should be an equitable and peaceful solution which takes account of all interests involved including specifically those of Indonesia. For my part I do not believe that the road to such a solution has been closed: indeed, it is my firm conviction that for the first time in many years there are now possibilities of progress towards a just and amicable settlement.

Reflecting Australian surprise, Hamilton minuted that “The words “Netherlands” and “self-determination” or “people” do not appear!!”. It is likely that New Zealand took its cues from the British. They may even have agreed with London on the timing of this revelation, because a letter from the British Government containing more disturbing information arrived in Australia on the same day. In essence, the message – addressed personally to Menzies – consisted of a request for an Australian opinion on a plan whereby an administrative authority would be placed in charge of WNG. Indonesia and the Netherlands would be “associated” with this body, but not given administrative

58 Emphasis original. The portion of this paragraph beginning, “If we did let this”, and ending, “Dutch and Indonesians, but should”, comes from a corrective cable (see unnumbered cablegram from Washington, 21 December 1961, in the same file); this part of cablegram 3163 had been incorrectly transmitted.  
59 In his memoirs, Beale unreliably explains events surrounding the demise of traditional policy by focussing on the period from January 1962. See H. Beale, This Inch of Time: Memoirs of Politics and Diplomacy, Melbourne, 1977, pp. 158-9.  
60 Telegram 612 from Wellington to the NZ High Commission, Canberra, 21 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 56, NAA. A minute states that a copy was given to Australia on 22 December.  
61 Minute by Hamilton on a copy of the message from Holyoake, 22 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 57, NAA.  
62 See extract from MacMillan to Menzies, 27 December 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.
power, and after a time the inhabitants would be given the choice of whether to “secede from Indonesia”. It was admitted the chances of Indonesia accepting such a scheme were not great, but the note described these ideas as the “only alternative...[the British] Government can find”. It would have been obvious to the Australians that the British were vainly trying to find a solution that would be a little more palatable to their Dutch and Australian friends, in spite of the by now dominant conviction in London that Indonesia had to be placated. Actually, the paragraphs that acted as a preamble to the presentation of the British plan gave an unmistakable picture of the main theme of UK WNG policy. Here, Menzies was told that

you suggest...all we need to do to dissuade the Indonesians from an attack is to stand firm and that the most that they are likely to attempt is a token landing....In the long run the British Government do not see how Indonesia can fail to invade West New Guinea if she does not get what she wants....We do not therefore believe that the status quo can be prolonged for more than a few months at the outside.

Making a second point which, with the first, led to an obvious conclusion, it was added “a local war over West New Guinea would be a disaster....[the British] Government’s aim is to stop the fighting breaking out.” Taken in this context, the British plan expressed later in the paper would probably have been rightly interpreted as a token gesture of goodwill.

If the Australians needed any further confirmation that the British, like the Americans, believed it was time to give the Indonesians what they wanted, it came in a letter from MacMillan on 27 December. MacMillan had met with Kennedy in Bermuda on 21 and 22 December and had discussed the WNG problem. In the second meeting, Kennedy told the British that the new administration had made no commitment to supporting the Dutch, even if only logistically, in the case of an attack, and they had no intention of doing so. MacMillan replied that the UK were “under a long-standing obligation” to give the Netherlands logistic backing but, as this would essentially involve re-fuelling Dutch ships in Singapore, they “would be sorry to have to do this”; it would increase tension between Indonesia, at one end, and Malaya and Singapore at the other. MacMillan said the Dutch did not think they could win a conflagration, while Kennedy added that “military operations would be likely to strengthen the Communist position in Indonesia – which would be contrary to the interests of the West as a whole.” Predictably, in the light of this, it “was generally agreed that...the right course

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65 The following account is taken from a British record of the meeting at Government House, Bermuda, 22 December 1961, in FO 371/160009. For the State Department record of 22 December meeting see 756C.00/12-221, box 1837, RG 59, DF 1960-63, A2.
would be to do everything possible to prevent the outbreak of hostilities over West Irian and to persuade the Dutch Government to accept some arrangement which, whether through mediation or otherwise, would enable them to extricate themselves from their present position." As far as the Australians were concerned, they were to be pushed to realize the game was up:

It was finally agreed that the United States and United Kingdom Governments should each impress on the Australian Government the desirability of avoiding military operations in West Irian and should suggest that, for the purpose of avoiding this, it would be preferable that the Western Powers should refrain from offering to support the Dutch in resisting any Indonesian attack on this territory. The Australian Government could be reminded in this connection that active Western help to the Dutch in such a situation was likely to provoke the Indonesians to take retaliatory action against Western interests in Indonesia, which would be even more damaging to Australia than Indonesian occupation of West Irian.

During the conversation, Kennedy – obviously fearful that Australia might fight in the event of an attack – had suggested that they should find out whether such intervention was planned by the Australians.\(^{64}\) The decision to pressure the Liberal Government was geared towards preventing this by demonstrating that no support would be forthcoming from the US and Britain during an Indonesian invasion of WNG, and by suggesting that both desired that Australia not embark on a maverick crusade to save the territory in such a situation. Though ostensibly dealing with the repercussions of such a move, the final sentence was a subtle reminder that the US and UK were ready to sacrifice a non-Indonesian WNG in an attempt to ensure the political future of the archipelago as a whole.

In his letter to Menzies, MacMillan did not disguise the thrust of Anglo-American thinking in Bermuda. He wrote:

In this message I would like to make only one point [on WNG]. If we should find ourselves helping the Dutch in military operations against the Indonesians we must assume that retaliatory action would be taken against Western interests in Indonesia. The President and I were inclined to think that the preservation of those interests and the discouragement of Communist influence in Indonesia are more important to the West than the maintenance of the Dutch position in Dutch New Guinea. For this reason it seemed to us that we must do our utmost to persuade the Dutch to find some tolerable means of extricating themselves from their position there....We realise of course that Indonesian ambitions in New Guinea present special problems for you and the recent developments must be causing you a good deal of anxiety. I fear however that we are faced here with a choice of evils.\(^{65}\)

This was, for the Australians, conclusive evidence that they were now isolated, and it was a devastating blow in the attack on their resolve that had begun with Beale’s report

\(^{64}\) This piece of information comes from the State Department record.

\(^{65}\) Extract from Macmillan to Menzies, 27 December 1961, in A1838/276, TS3036/6/1, Pt 14, NAA.
of his conversation with Harriman on 18 December. The ‘crunch point’ had finally come.

It appears likely that Menzies conferred with the new Minister for External Affairs, Garfield Barwick, and other relevant Ministers over the next few days. With Australia’s isolation from its most important allies now clear, a decision had to be made as to whether the Government should go it alone. Australia’s inability to defend WNG alone or with the Dutch may have been considered. Still, the Australians did not believe it likely the current crisis would result in a conflagration, so reiteration of US and UK unwillingness fight for the territory (which had been recognized many months before) was not particularly worrying per se. What was alarming was that the British and Americans were convinced a crisis existed, and that they were determined to force the Dutch – whose resolve was fragile – to give WNG to the Indonesians. This was the gist of Beale’s message; unreasonable panic may have occurred in Washington, but Australia was probably to be presented with a fait accompli regardless of what it did or said. Although prepared to agitate American, British, and Asian opinion by standing firm, Menzies and the Ministers he consulted apparently accepted Beale’s argument that such measures would be futile. A statement by Barwick on 30 December revealed, in necessarily veiled language given the domestic and international position, that the Australian Government had changed its stance. The Minister commented that “along with all Australians he hoped that Indonesia and the Netherlands would enter...negotiations...and that they would pursue these negotiations patiently to a conclusion satisfactory to themselves and to the community of nations.” Furthermore, it was admitted that Australia was not a party principal to the dispute. This was followed by a reference to Australia’s “interest” in self-determination, and the expectation that Indonesia could hardly deny this to the Papuans, but this by implication recognized the likelihood of Indonesian control, and it was simply a gloss aimed at minimizing damage to the Government’s position in Australia itself.

An important corollary to the Australian surrender was an increased determination in Canberra to do everything to forestall threats of an Indonesian attack. Now that the Government had distanced itself from the dispute, it was important – from a domestic viewpoint – that the Dutch at least appear to be negotiating freely. If the Netherlands and Indonesia agreed on an outcome not to the liking of the Australians,

66 Garfield Barwick (Minister for External Affairs and Federal Attorney-General) had been a prominent lawyer, and became Commonwealth Attorney-General in 1958 – a position he retained during his tenure as Minister for External Affairs. For an account of Barwick’s life, see D. Marr, Barwick, Sydney, 1980.
Menzies and his colleagues could complain, and yet insist on the Dutch right as sovereign power to dispose of WNG as they saw fit. On the other hand, if the Netherlands were seen to be forced to come to the table on Indonesia’s terms, the Liberal Government expected to be branded as appeasers.

Consequently, Menzies had made sure that Barwick’s statement on 30 December was coupled with strong deterrent action. Perhaps from the tone of Indonesian rhetoric, and a request by the Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, Brigadier Suadi, to see the Prime Minister, the DEA had suspected that the Indonesians were seeking to tell the Australians they could no longer stand by assurances of no force. When Suadi visited, he did not directly address the question of force, but asked for the Australian viewpoint on various occurrences in Indonesia, such as the President’s ‘command’, and the apparent pressure on Sukarno from the people to take action. Menzies’ reaction was vehement. He was, he said,

interested to know what was the real purpose of this present approach. Was it an ultimatum? Was it intended to scare Australia? If so, the Prime Minister could assure the Ambassador that Australia was not easily frightened.

Suadi meekly replied that he did not think force would necessarily be used, but Menzies again went on the offensive, asking whether the Ambassador’s appointment was meant to show that Indonesian guarantees were now invalid. “If so”, he continued, “this would be a shocking breach of a solemn promise.” A Counsellor of the Indonesian Embassy, Bahrum Sjah, later said that Menzies had been “rude” to Suadi, and that Suadi “had felt insulted” and was “very upset”. Nevertheless, it would have been obvious to officials in Jakarta that, while desperate to prevent threats and violence over WNG, the Australians had eventually stepped aside.

On 2 January 1962, Tange confirmed to the British High Commissioner, Sir William Oliver, that the Australians had indeed given in because of the fait accompli that would result from the Anglo-American decision to coerce a demoralized Netherlands Government. When asked the reasons for the 30 December statement, the Secretary said they were

To bring Australian opinion up to date. There had been an absence of public statement on this matter. It was also felt important to prepare opinion for future contingencies and to point out that

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67 An undated, unsigned memorandum broaching possible answers to requests for Australia’s position on the disavowal of no-force promises can be found in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 57, NAA.
68 Conversation between Menzies and Brigadier Suadi (Indonesian Ambassador to Australia), 30 December 1961, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 57, NAA.
69 Conversation between Bahrum Sjah (Counsellor, Indonesian Embassy, Canberra) and Blakeney, 2 January 1962, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 59, NAA.
such contingencies might include some over which Australia had no control. By this he meant that in the last resort the running would be made by the United States and ourselves [the UK].  

Tange’s own record of the meeting reinforces the above interpretation. He told Oliver that “Part of the background” to Barwick’s statement “was our interpretation of U.K. policy (e.g. Mr. MacMillan’s letter and the report of the attitude jointly reached by President Kennedy and Mr. MacMillan; our interpretation of present American attitudes toward negotiation by the Dutch; and our understanding of the attitude of the Dutch themselves”).  

Barwick’s later version of events deserves attention. It is clear that his account, published in 1995, and which has had considerable influence on attempts to decipher the last weeks of traditional Australian policy, is thoroughly inaccurate. He argues that a memorandum presented by him to Cabinet in the second week of January “was written well before we had any knowledge of the change in American policy” that came later in the year; the memorandum even preceded “any change in [the US] approach”. Moreover, he contends that the Government later changed its stance because he eventually managed to persuade Menzies that cession of WNG would improve relations between Australia and Indonesia. Obviously, neither of these claims can be sustained. Australia knew of, and was influenced by, changes in US (and UK) policy during December, and was clearly not swayed by anxieties about relations with Indonesia. It is difficult to determine whether the inaccuracies in Barwick’s account constituted a deliberate attempt to portray himself as being more influential and ‘radical’ than, in fact, he was, or whether they were simply the lapses of a man in his 90s looking back 40 years. Whatever the case, his representation of events cannot be considered a firm basis for historical analysis.

Further news of the position of the US and UK was received a short time after Tange’s talk with Oliver. In another letter, Macmillan wrote of other aspects of the WNG problem discussed in Bermuda but not mentioned in his first note. Menzies was told the US had made clear that it would in no way undertake any military commitments in the face of an Indonesian attack. MacMillan wrote that the British

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70 Telegram 2 from Canberra to the CRO, 2 January 1962, in FO 371/166530, PRO.
71 This comes from the Australian record of the conversation between Tange and Sir William Oliver (British High Commissioner, Canberra), 2 January 1962, in A1838/280, 3036/6/1, Pt 59, NAA.
72 For secondary accounts heavily reliant on Barwick’s work, see Phelps, op.cit., pp. 355-59, and Hutton, op.cit., pp. 74-76. Tange (interview, 23 June 1998); perhaps influenced by Barwick’s memoirs, recently argued that Barwick was the main factor in bringing about change in Cabinet policy. Presented with relevant documents, Tange was unable to defend this view.
74 ibid., pp. 177-78.
themselves would be highly reluctant to carry out their promise of logistic support. Significantly, the Australian Prime Minister was also told that "the Dutch would be glad to extricate themselves from New Guinea if they could do so without national humiliation and were prepared for a negotiated settlement which would leave the Papuans with the right of self-determination." The Australians were already aware that The Hague had accepted negotiations in principle, though it seems that MacMillan was attempting to present the Dutch as being now more concerned to prevent "national humiliation" than ensure "the right to self-determination". If, by doing so, he wanted to ensure the continuation of changes in Canberra’s policy, this was probably unnecessary, though it would have reaffirmed in Australian minds the wisdom of their choices.

Barwick went to Cabinet on 11 and 12 January 1962 to ratify the decisions of late December. In other words, these meetings simply confirmed the surrender that had been earlier conducted in the confidence that none in Government would disagree. In a submission entitled "Where the Dispute is Heading", Barwick argued that in the face of international and domestic pressure, the Netherlands was likely to move towards a settlement that would guarantee Indonesia sovereignty, and that pledges to the Papuan population would probably be "covered by some largely face-saving formula." He spoke of the possibility that Indonesia might resort to force, and that the US and UK gave first priority to preventing this. The British and Americans were thus driving at negotiations, and had admitted the probable result of this was a hand-over to Indonesia. As Cabinet would not fight for WNG, Barwick said that the Government had to decide what attitude it would take to negotiations – the only real question of substance that remained was how an Indonesian WNG would relate to ENG. In a rather convoluted supplementary memorandum, Barwick put forward the view that Australia should take the initiative in recognizing Indonesian sovereignty over WNG, and promote a solution whereby an international administration would run the territory (with Indonesian input, or preceding a period of Indonesian administration), followed by a plebiscite whereby the people could chose their own future. He explained that the purpose of the initiative would be to ensure agreement between the parties for the transfer of sovereignty with some provision for respect for the principle of self-determination and to improve our position with the Indonesians.

75 Macmillan to Menzies, 5 January 1962, in A6706/1, NAA.
76 Submission No. 10 by Barwick, 11 January 1962, in A5819/2, Vol. 1, NAA.
77 The supplementary memorandum is attached to Submission No. 10, in A5819/2, Vol. 1, NAA.
Cabinet rejected this last proposal as “unnecessary and inappropriate”, and recommended only that the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, knowing as they did “the mind” of Cabinet, make other governments aware of Australia’s views as necessary.78 Though not explicitly stated – perhaps because the Ministers were already aware of the changes that had been put in place – there can be no doubt, given a final reference to the US and UK, and the public statement prepared for release later in the day, that the Australians had thrown in the towel. In the last sentence of the Cabinet record, the comment was made

that in whatever messages are sent to the British and American Governments, consideration should be given to including strong expressions bearing on the enduring importance to the western [sic] world of the principle of strength in the face of threats of aggression for territorial purposes and to the possible embarrassment to Australia of the continuance of threats of the use of force.

No reference to previously oft-repeated calls for self-determination can be seen here, but it is possible to detect a sense of bitterness over what was perceived as appeasement of Sukarno. The potential for “embarrassment” was most likely a reference to concerns over domestic reaction if negotiations were to be continually affected by Indonesian belligerence, and to the extension of Jakarta’s claim to ENG. Certainly, with the loss of WNG, these two issues had become central points of concern for the Australian Government.

The public statement of 12 January concentrated on the need for negotiations, and the need to prevent hostilities.79 In terms of Government policy, the stance taken during the Subandrio visit of 1959 proved a convenient safety net. Australia, it was said, was not a party principal in the dispute, and would recognize a Dutch-Indonesian agreement freely reached – although, of course, it was remarked that “we...are deeply attached to the attainment by under-developed peoples...of the right to choose their own future.” These aspects aside, it was paragraph nine that surreptitiously pointed to the driving force in the derailment of Australian WNG policy:

Having regard not only to our treaty rights and responsibilities but also to the hard facts of international life, we act in close consultation with the great free powers, particularly Great Britain and the United States of America. No responsible Australian would wish to see any action affecting the safety of Australia on the issues of war or peace in this area except in concert with our great and powerful friends.

Thus officially ended – for reasons, and at a speed, unexpected – a policy that had stretched from Spender to Barwick.

78 Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 11 and 12 January 1962, in A4943, Vol. 6, NAA.
79 A copy of the statement is attached to loc.cit.
Arguably, the main discovery made by the Menzies Government after 18 December was that Australia had become more dependent on the UK, and especially the US, than had been realized. Unknown to policy-makers in Canberra, they had been operating on the assumption that the British and Americans would never force Australia to renege in the absence of actual war over WNG. Respect for Australian views on national security would be maintained. Such thinking explains Australian boldness and assurance – effectively until the last minute – in the face of changes in US and UK policy. Now, however, this supposition was shown to be false; Washington and London had simply ignored Australian views, and it was consequently obvious that the limited degree of movement Australia had over an already limited WNG policy had been completely circumscribed. Australian policy no longer had autonomous value, but had become wholly reliant on US and UK decisions.

On a wider scale, this meant that Australia’s view of itself as the power south of Singapore was utterly destroyed. The country was now completely dependent in the area – both militarily and politically – on its two main allies. Moreover, it would become more vulnerable as Indonesia moved into what had previously been the outer portion of Australia’s immediate sphere of influence. This re-definition of Australia’s status would not have been confined to Cabinet. The ‘Australian’ outlook was again truly representative of that of the nation, for it was obvious to the public that the announcement of 12 January 1962 conveyed a fait accompli. Australia was no longer allowed to determine its own path in offshore SEA, and, for the first time, it shared a land border with a threatening Asian power.

The loss of the remaining trappings of middle power status was traumatic in itself, but it was doubly so for one reason: the event which revealed Australia to be entirely dependent on the US and UK, and which would mean defence of the country would have to occur along its borders, was also one which suggested the integrity of Australian territory was not reliant on US ‘friendliness’ and the UK’s ‘family’ loyalty, but ultimately on whether Australian needs squared with American and British self-interest. It had always been thought by Menzies, and most of his colleagues, that if Australia became besieged, it was the cultural connection with these countries, and not ANZUS, that would save the nation.80 There had, certainly, been a time of pessimism in

80 A distinction must be made here between the protection of Australia proper, and ‘forward defence’. The Australians were aware that US involvement in areas, and operations, further afield was very much dependent on perceptions of self-interest in Washington. (Indeed, selfishness that was, to Canberra,
mid-1958 when knowledge of probable US inaction over an attack on WNG was equated with disdain for Australia’s immediate security. But this doubt had been momentary. Australian confidence in US prescience and sympathy on the direct security of the nation had been restored by American commitment to deterrence, and by the emerging belief that the US was, in placing the struggle in Indonesia above WNG, in fact acting in Australia’s best interests. When the Liberal Government decided WNG was, in reality, not truly linked to the near-anarchic situation in Indonesia, it expected the US to reach a similar conclusion, and therefore quietly approve the return of a traditional DNG policy. At worst, the Kennedy Administration might disagree on the place of Irian in Indonesian domestic politics, but nonetheless honour Australian security concerns unless absolutely forced to do otherwise. As for the British, the steadfast support of Tory governments for the thrust of Australian defence policy had always been taken for granted.

The shock, then, of finding that the British and Americans were capable of placing their peripheral interests above what they recognized as a central concern of Australian defence thinking, was tremendous – particularly at a time when Australia could do nothing for itself. Australian policy-makers now had to presume, while admitting to complete dependence, that US, and maybe British, help would not be automatic, based on ‘organic’ links, if Australian territory itself was attacked. The consequences of this were apparently far-reaching during the 1960s, at least in relation to the Americans. (The impact in connection with the British is not clear, because manifest signs of declining UK power, and its intention to withdraw from SEA, intervened. Nevertheless, WNG may have been important in persuading the Menzies Government that the UK would not be prepared to use its remaining influence to fight for Australia, and that Australia therefore had to look to the US). The Australians turned to using a formal agreement – the previously largely superfluous ANZUS agreement – and US perceptions of self-interest – by encouraging ideas that SEA was vital to US national security – as the principal means of trying to ensure that dependence also guaranteed safety. Such an approach was perhaps most clearly seen in Vietnam. Here,
by making a politically useful contribution to the American effort, Australia hoped to both encourage the US conviction that massive involvement in the region was necessary, and to oblige the US to uphold its commitment under ANZUS. Unfortunately for the Australian Government, these hopes were lost when the US ‘lost’ Vietnam, and it soon felt compelled to embrace independence as it had in the 1950s – though this time unwillingly, and as a quietly ‘self-reliant’, not ‘imperial’, power.

82 In All the Way, p. 333, Pemberton has argued that one of the causes of Australia’s commitment to Vietnam was the doubt experienced by Australian leaders regarding America’s willingness to defend Australia in a war with Indonesia.
Conclusion

At the start of this study, it was said that Australia’s part in the WNG dispute, which proved a major preoccupation of the Menzies Government and the Australian people, has been unjustifiably neglected by historians of Australian 1950s and 1960s foreign policy. Consequently, generalizations concerning the nature of that policy were to be questioned. It was asked, in particular – and this constituted a central objective of this thesis – whether the notions that Australia feared SEA, and therefore believed itself to be dependent on the US and UK, are soundly based. The answer to this, as determined through close examination of three periods representative of Australian WNG policy over 12 years, has been shown to be both ‘yes’ and ‘no’. Australia’s perception of itself in relation to SEA, and to its British and American allies, emerges from the exercise as complex and variable.

Between 1950 and 1957, as illustrated in the years 1950 and 1954, Australia’s response to the WNG problem reveals the nation as unafraid of the principal Southeast Asian obstacle to the status quo on the island – Indonesia – and subsequently independent of the US and Britain. In fact, assuming Australia was fearful and reliant in the context of mainland SEA, it is evident that Australian self-perceptions were settled along geo-strategic lines, and not in a ‘blanket’ manner, as is often suggested; Australians viewed their relationships with Asia and the US-UK very differently according to whether Canberra’s policies pertained to the area north or south of Singapore. Specifically, Australia’s satellite status in mainland SEA was contrasted by the conviction that, immediately offshore, Australia was an ‘imperial’ power. The latter position was manifested and instructed by Australia’s independence from America and Britain on the WNG issue, and invulnerability to Indonesia on the same question. Use of the Dutch administration as proxy in maintaining NG as a strategic sphere of influence was behaviour similarly archetypical of power-political 19th Century-style thinking.

The halcyon era of Australia as a self-identified middle power, seen as able to project its influence well beyond its shores, ended during the rise and fall of the Indonesian rebel movement. In this turbulent time, traditional Government policy on WNG – hitherto symbolic of Australia’s presumed standing in the immediate region – began to change. These modifications, unsurprisingly, proved rooted in greater anxiety over Indonesia, and in increased reliance on British and American influence. For example, the decision to allow policies concerning Indonesia (such as arms deliveries) to disturb Dutch-Australian solidarity was related to fears over communism, and the need for US and UK action to combat it.
Still, it was not until January 1959 that such anxiety and dependence was shown by WNG policy to be virtually all-encompassing. Here, the Menzies Government chose ‘controlled bias’, whereby Australia would back the Dutch in a low-key way, and allow the importance of events in Indonesia to temper policy, yet acquiesce in a transfer to the Republic if a selection had to be made between a ‘friendly’ WNG and a permanently hostile or communist Indonesia. This new line was developed primarily because officials in Canberra were persuaded in the latter half of 1958 that Indonesia’s flirtations with the Sino-Soviet bloc had become Australia’s most pressing security problem, and because they accepted that Indonesia had the ability to lodge armed forces on WNG. The Government endeavoured to balance such overriding concerns by leaning far more heavily on the US and UK (in areas, for instance, such as Indonesia policy and on deterring Indonesia from using its armed forces).

Having thus marked Australia as a diminished power, living anxiously, and strongly dependent, Cabinet’s views had come to accord more closely to common modern interpretations of the country’s foreign policy relationship with SEA, and Britain and America. Certainly, T. B. Millar’s view that Australia was basically fearful and reliant in an all-encompassing sense fundamentally matched Government perceptions of reality in 1959. But it is notable that, apart from emerging late in the decade, these views were not shared by the Australian public – as indicated by the furore over the Casey-Subandrio statement. ‘Australia’ did not believe in these notions; only its elected representatives and some of its public servants did, and it was not until 1962 that the Government position was widely accepted. Therefore, even between 1959 and December 1961, it is not accurate to judge ‘Australia’ as subject to a fear-dependence mechanism. Instead, the country should be described as undergoing transition.

With the fait accompli of late 1961, coupled with the associated public announcement of the next month, the last vestiges of independence were removed from Australian minds. Asia, additionally, was set to physically touch an Australian boundary, exposing the Commonwealth to greater danger. Australia, in other words, was now believed to be more a besieged outpost of Western civilization than a power of any description. The nation was, for the first time, dominated by self-perceptions relative to SEA, and concerning the United States and Britain in that area, that coincide with current historiographical orthodoxy on the topic.

Even at this point of coalescence, though, the frequently misapprehended backdrop remains critical to an understanding of the 1960s. Australia's confidence in British and American regard for Australian definitions of national security interest— which had braced the stubborn attitude of 1961, and even the earlier 'imperial' approach— was crushed with the remnants of autonomy. A fear-insecure dependence dynamic had been triggered, and appears central, for example, to an explanation of the origins of the Vietnam commitment. Beyond this discovery (and the scope of this thesis), the deeper impact on Australian attitudes to SEA of the perceived cultural bond with the US and UK needs further investigation. Australian shock at the Anglo-American fait accompli of December 1961 suggests that the Government's tendency to perceive and choose dependence in specific spheres, in response to particular fears relevant to those areas, was girded by the assumption of a 'special' relationship with the US and UK on home defence. When this assumption broke down, fears for continental security seem to have had an impact on Australian dependence further afield; the direct correlation between geography, vulnerability, and dependence no longer applied.

In general, a close study of Australia's involvement in the dispute over WNG, with a view to illuminating aspects of the national self-image, provides a corrective to popular thought on the same topics—thought which is grounded, not on proper comprehension of the WNG "preoccupation", but on a fixation with formal Government agreements and mainland Southeast Asian conflict. In looking forward from ANZUS, and backward from Vietnam, historians have simplified and misread Australian attitudes that, apart from intrinsic interest and importance, are essential to an accurate interpretation of such events and the post-War decades by which they were spanned.

Aside from the central questions posed in the Introduction and specifically answered in the discourse that followed, there are other general issues worthy of note. One of these is to observe the dominant influences on the formation of Australia's WNG policy. There is little doubt that the attitudes of Cabinet were paramount in this connection. There were times when the Government was sensitive to public opinion, and to the Opposition, particularly near elections— and there may be a degree to which the full impact of the electorate or political opponents is not revealed in the files. On the other hand, it seems clear that the often close resemblance between public opinion and Government policy had more to do with shared conviction than deliberate mimicry designed to keep the Liberal-Country Party coalition in power. When the Government wanted to change policy in 1959, it did so in spite of continuing strong support among the public for the Dutch. Even with the uproar after the Casey-Subandrio joint
statement, the new approach to Indonesia was not forfeited. And it was finally dropped, not because of public opinion, but due to a review by Menzies of the dynamics of the Indonesian domestic situation.

The dominance of Cabinet thinking over the policy-making process can also be discerned in interactions between Cabinet and the public service. The DEA, for example, never proved capable of stimulating major changes in official policy. This failure is most obviously seen in 1955-56—a period (not covered in this study) in which the Department pushed for greater accommodation of Indonesia. Later, in 1960, the DEA’s notions of a united NG were quickly dismissed by the Ministers. The Departmental suggestions that were accepted were nearly always adopted because they suited a pre-existing ministerial line. The Department of Defence may have had a little more influence than the DEA—due to the fact that ‘strategic’, as opposed to ‘political’, thoughts dominated Cabinet minds for a long time—but the same principles applicable to the DEA were usually evident. For instance, Cabinet agreed with Defence appreciations for most of the 1950s, but in January 1959 reinterpreted the relative strategic value of WNG and Indonesia against Defence advice. Fundamentally, the Australian public service exerted a much weaker influence on policy than its equivalent in other countries such as Britain and the USA.

The Prime Minister’s Department (PMD) may have been an exception. Outwardly, this appears unlikely. There is little evidence that this department had an influence on WNG policy through formal channels. Memoranda on WNG, either between officers or to Menzies, are relatively scarce in its files. On the other hand, occasional records, such as Timbs’ intervention against the DEA Cabinet submission of early 1960, suggest that a small group of senior officials in PMD followed the WNG issue closely. It is probable that, according to Menzies’ preference, they spoke, rather than wrote, to him. Thus, it seems that an informal influence may have been exerted on policy by members of the PMD. Yet this is perhaps best characterized as personal, rather than institutional, influence. Menzies maintained a select group of advisers, headed first by Allen Brown, and later by E. J. Bunting, whose work relationships with him were defined more by his personal trust and esteem than official position. Advisers in the DEA and other departments, by contrast, were more conventionally distant and independent—at least on WNG.

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2 For comment on these close advisers, nicknamed “the boys”, see Bunting, op. cit., pp. 96-127.
Within Cabinet itself, Menzies' preeminence was apparent. At important moments, it was often the Prime Minister who articulated or finalized the Cabinet position. For example, even though detailed minutes of what individual Ministers said are not yet available, it seems the Cabinet meetings and decisions of August 1958 were, in the last analysis, thoroughly dominated by him. Similarly, in 1960, it was Menzies who took the lead in reverting to more traditional tactics on WNG, and, contrary to common belief, he was instrumental in bringing about an end to orthodox policy.

While acknowledging Menzies' role, the basic unanimity in Cabinet must not be forgotten. There is no evidence of division between the Ministers before 1958. Late in that year, some disagreement over the problem of a military guarantee emerged. But this was short-lived. By 1959, Cabinet was united in strong support for a policy that did not allow for material assistance to the Dutch. This unity explains why Menzies' personal influence was in fact rarely manifest. It also warns against putting too much emphasis on the authority of individual Ministers such as Spender, Casey, or Barwick. Spender may have brought a certain energy to bear on WNG policy – and Casey his own urbane touch – but both operated within the limits of a general consensus. The same may be said of Barwick, for all his pretensions to radicalism.

A secondary purpose of this thesis was to supplement and assess the small amount of scholarship on WNG that has emerged thus far. In terms of the latter task, past work does not stand up well. Material based on the public record, while perhaps reasonable in view of the limited sources, proves of little use in any meaningful analysis of the WNG problem. Given the penchant of the Menzies Government for secrecy on foreign policy issues, such histories perhaps obscure more than they reveal. For example, Viviani and Haupt are wide of the mark in speculating on the state of Australian policy in 1950, and on the fact and meaning of Australian involvement in the events of 1957-58. Their conclusions provide no reliable foundation for generalization by historians unacquainted with the topic. The document-based studies – a doctoral dissertation by Phelps, and two short papers by Chauvel – suffer from both lack of accurate detail, and, conversely, arbitrary selection from among the minutae of Australian and international records. The result is a failure to construct a narrative faithful to the main features of Australian policy, and to misidentify or exaggerate the importance of smaller issues. This is not to underestimate the task of converting the thousands of papers on WNG into a coherent history of Australian attitudes during the

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3 See Pemberton in Cain, op.cit., pp. 170-72.
dispute. It is a massive task, and made infinitely more difficult by the lack of interest shown the subject thus far. Certainly, the efforts required to make the current study readable were substantial, and more could be said. The period from 1958 onward is highly complicated – not least in terms of the actions of the Menzies Government – and needs more thought than was possible in the time available. It is hoped that subsequent scholars find an appropriate base for further scholarship on what are fundamental questions about Australian perceptions of their place, capacities, and policies in the region.

A postscript to Australian involvement in the WNG dispute is that of the continuing concern of the Commonwealth Government with events on the island of NG after January 1962. In July 1962, the Netherlands and Indonesia agreed to a plan that specified a phased withdrawal of Dutch personnel from the territory, and their replacement, under temporary UN supervision, by Indonesian officials. It was also agreed that an act of self-determination would occur by 1969 – though this was widely (and correctly) regarded as a façade for an Indonesian takeover. The reality of Indonesian control well before 1969 meant NG was less valuable to Australia as a buffer zone. It was no longer possible for Australia to seek, as had been done under Spender and Casey in the 1950s, the exclusion from NG of a possibly hostile Asian influence. This did not mean the island was viewed as strategically unimportant. East New Guinea housed bases that could still be of use for defence ‘in depth’ and that, conversely, could make defence of the mainland more difficult if held by an unfriendly power. This explains in part the strenuous efforts made by Barwick after January 1962 to get assurances from the US that it would not tolerate Indonesian expansion into ENG in the same way that it had over WNG. Similar motives were behind the pains taken to steer ENG towards independence of a kind that would suit Australian defence requirements – that is, to create a state that would be part of Melanesia, not Asia, and to ensure that this state was friendly to, and dependent on, its southern neighbour.

These continuities and changes in Australian attitudes towards NG after 1962, and what they mean in terms of Australia’s relationship with Indonesia, SEA, and the US – including what they show of evolving perceptions in Australia of the nation’s

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4 See Menzies’ comments in November 1964 on the importance of being prepared to defend the north-south NG border (Verrier, op.cit., p. 189).
5 These efforts are described by Pemberton, All the Way, pp. 104-5.
influence – deserve the attention of historians. This is especially so as more documents on the period become available – and the same will be said as current documents become available in 30 years’ time. Indeed, Australia retains security interests in NG, and these continue to speak of the complex problems faced by Australia as it looks to the future in SEA.

Bibliographical Note

As mentioned in the Introduction, there are relatively few works on WNG. The bulk of these, furthermore, are based on the public record. R. C. Bone's work, *The Dynamics of the Western New Guinea (Irian Barat) Problem*, is one of the oldest and most frequently cited studies, but is poorly written and overly partisan. A more balanced account – and a useful source of factual material – is William Henderson's *West New Guinea: The Dispute and its Settlement*. The best English-language work on policy from a Dutch perspective is A. Lijphardt's *The Trauma of Decolonization: The Dutch and West New Guinea*, though a book of this kind drawing on declassified material is still awaited. For a Dutch overview of Netherlands administrative policy in WNG, see Kees Lagerberg's *West Irian and Jakarta Imperialism*. Of the non-archival works focussed on Australian attitudes, Verrier, Viviani, and Haupt are the most comprehensive. Verrier does not pursue the WNG question in as much detail as the others, but provides a helpful analysis of pre-War Australian opinion on NG, and its generic link with the post-War position on WNG. Viviani's speculations are often reasonably accurate, and the thesis is worth looking at for interviews with now deceased figures (such as Spender). Haupt's dissertation is the least valuable, being highly descriptive. All three studies are now of limited use given that scholars have access to government papers from the entire 12 year period.

As noted in the Conclusion, the documentary studies of the dispute by Phelps and Chauvel suffer from various problems.1 Within a limit of around 100,000 words, Phelps ambitiously tries to cover each year between 1949 and 1962 in relatively equal detail, but misses and misconstrues subtleties in Australian policy as a result. However, anyone planning to visit the Australian, British, or US archives (Phelps used US and UK documents gathered by his Supervisor) should consult his footnotes and bibliography as a check against this bibliography. Chauvel's first paper on NNG, 'The emergence of the West New Guinea dispute', concentrates on the 1947-49 period. It contains some interesting generalizations regarding the Australian construction of its "neighbourhood", but focuses too much on the DEA. It also takes little note of the changes that the Liberal-Country Government brought to WNG policy. His second article, 'Up the Creek Without a Paddle: Australia, West New Guinea and the 'Great and Powerful Friends'', is generally

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1 Edwards does deal briefly with WNG in *Crises and Commitments*, (pp. 200-07) but his treatment is cursory at best. This is an undoubted defect in a book concentrating on Australian involvement in SEA conflict.
accurate in terms of the briefly-told ‘story’ of WNG through to 1962. A weakness is the importance given to an Indonesian proposal in 1951 to solve the dispute, and does not reflect truly the central concerns (as is claimed) of the Australian and American governments on WNG between 1951 and 1954. Chauvel is currently working on a book on Australian policy towards the WNG dispute.

Regarding primary sources on WNG, the most significant from an Australian perspective are contained in two DEA series of files (one ‘Top Secret’, the other ‘Secret’) entitled “West New Guinea: Developments Relating to Future Status”. The reference numbers vary, but files may be found using a word-search function in the NAA database. The top secret series is unsurprisingly more important, but by no means contains all notable material. Certainly, all of the files from these series and relevant to February 1950 to January 1962 (approximately 75 in number) should be read by students of Australian WNG policy. Files not included in these series, but nonetheless of considerable significance, are: those containing JIC, JPC, and DC reports on WNG (A1838/269, TS696/3/2, Pt 1; A5954/1, 1682/13; A1838/269, TS696/3/2, Pt 2; A1838/269, TS696/3/3, Pt 1; A1838/269, TS696/2/2, Pt 4; A1838/269, TS696/3/8, A1838/269, TS666/42; A7941/2, I8, Pt 1; A1838/269, TS666/40), letters to Menzies from Casey (M2576,1, 39), and various files relevant to Subandrio’s visit (A1838/276, TS3036/6/1; Pt 1, A4940/1, C2314). Prime Ministers’ Department files on WNG consist mainly of duplicates of DEA cables contained in the DEA files, but they should be skimmed for occasional minutes and memoranda written by Menzies’ key advisers (see the A1209/23 series; search also ‘Dutch New Guinea’, ‘West New Guinea’, and ‘Netherlands New Guinea’). Cabinet minutes (otherwise named ‘Decisions’ or ‘Conclusions’) vary in series number, owing to changes in the system maintained by the Cabinet Secretariat, and are best found via hard copy reference files in the NAA reading room. All files of minutes between 1950 and 1962 should be skimmed. All Cabinet submissions on WNG will be referred to by number in the minutes.

Notable Australian primary sources outside the NAA include photocopies of Casey’s diaries at the National Library (MS6150, Series 4). These contain much material on WNG not mentioned in Casey’s published diaries. However, their value is tempered by the fact that they were not secret at the time; excerpts were distributed in large numbers to a wide variety of people. Menzies’ papers at the NLA, which include letters from Spender and others, are not particularly illuminating on WNG. Neither are those of Spender
(MS4875) The diaries of Sir Walter Crocker at the NLA are a rich source, particularly on the social dynamics in Cabinet and the DEA in the mid-1950s, but may only be accessed with permission.

In terms of sources on American policy, little secondary material is available. Pemberton’s chapter in *All the Way* is good on the Kennedy period, but he was unable to access all relevant documentation. Terrence Markin’s thesis, *The West Irian Dispute: How the Kennedy Administration Resolved that “Other” Southeast Asian Conflict*, is disappointing in terms of documentation – especially considering the ready access he had to US archives. It does contain a number of interviews with participants that should be browsed. A copy of Markin’s thesis may be obtained from the Menzies Library at the ANU. In connection with American primary sources, papers in the presidential libraries of Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy could be profitably scrutinized (time and money prevented me from doing so). Pemberton has looked at the WNG issue in Kennedy’s collection, but has not concentrated on those of Truman or Eisenhower. State Department records (RG 59) are available at Archives II in Maryland. Papers on multi-national issues like WNG are difficult to trace given that most documents are filed according to US relations with certain countries (for example, US-Indonesia relations, or US-Dutch relations), and not by topic. See State Department Decimal Files (for all periods between 1950 and 1962), under 756C.00; 756C.5; 656.98; 656.61; 656.56D11. State Department Lot Files also hold documents on WNG. See those of: the Policy Planning Staff, 1957-61, Lot 67D548, box 141; the Office of Western European Affairs, 1941-1954, Lot 56D37, Box 1; the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Lot 58D614, box 2, Lot 58D3, box 3, and Lot 59D19, box 1. See Phelps’ bibliography for other clues on RG 59 sources. Record groups apart from those created by the State Department (such as RG 330 – Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense) could reward study. Beyond this, *Foreign Relations of the United States* constitute essential reading, particularly regarding the later years of the dispute.

There are apparently no secondary works on British WNG policy. John Saltford (who was, and may still be, working for the PRO) was writing a PhD thesis on the topic. It is not known if he has completed this. Pertinent British primary records on WNG may be found at the PRO. Organization at the PRO is far superior to that at Archives II, and documents on WNG are easy to access. The general correspondence files of the Foreign

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2 The first part of the title also at times changes to ‘Dutch New Guinea’, or ‘Netherlands New Guinea’.
Office (FO 371) are the most important vis-à-vis WNG, and may be found with a simple word-search. Dominions Office files are also useful (DO 35 and DO 165). Most relevant Cabinet papers are available in hard copy in the reading room. There are other files on WNG, which I was unable to track in a four week period, that would be worth viewing. Again see Phelps’ bibliography for some of these.

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