

THE PARADOX OF LEAVING: FOUR HISTORICAL CASE
STUDIES ON THE DYNAMICS OF EXIT STRATEGIES

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Abstract

When studying exit strategies and their (military) implications, historical parallels come to mind. Because they are full of analogies with present-day expeditionary missions, for the purpose of this book probably the most thought-provoking and informative exits are those related to the process of decolonisation. Then, as now, the fundamental question was how to manage the political and military disengagement, while safeguarding Western political and economic influence. The four cases discussed here (Indonesia 1945-1949; Malaya 1945-1960; New Guinea 1945-1962 and Vietnam 1969-1973) suggest that exits in order to retain influence are intricately paradoxical by nature. They can only be understood properly by acknowledging that such exits are shaped by the complex and often contradictory dynamics of the interaction of civilian and military actors of the sides involved and the domestic and international environments, rather than by a preconceived end-state. Adaptation and constant reconsideration are a prerequisite for success or avoiding failure.

Keywords

exit, Indonesia, Malaya, New Guinea, Vietnam, military

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

When, in the early 1990s, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali presented his *Agenda for Peace* (1992) and NATO embraced out-of-area operations (1991-1993), the world soon discovered that such *second generation peace operations* entailed challenges of their own. These challenges were a dissonant in the general optimism of the public opinion and political decision makers in the West after the Cold War. They should not have come unexpectedly, though. After all, irrespective of whether they were 'blue' as in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s or 'green' as in the Gulf War of 2003 that toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein, military interventions in the post-Cold War era spurred involvement in state-building and the design of political institutions. These far-reaching and ambitious tasks proved far more difficult and complex than anticipated, if only because the military took on responsibility for law and order in an environment that was foreign to them. In the end it proved far easier to embark upon a mission than to disentangle and go home. Consequently the military became familiar with *mission creep* and discovered the importance of *road maps* to reach desired *end states*. They felt the need for a clear exit strategy that should have been agreed upon before the start of operations to deliver them from the quagmire. Such a strategy should provide guidance in the conception and execution of military operations.

However, it would be misleading to think that the phenomenon of exit strategies belongs exclusively to the post-Cold War era, though it may have been called differently. The violent end of western colonialism in Asia offers several cases of exit strategies, four of which will be discussed here. These are the Dutch war of decolonisation in Indonesia (1945-1949), the Malayan Emergency (1945-1960), the Dutch-Indonesian military confrontation over Dutch New Guinea (1960-1962) and the American exit from Vietnam (1969-1973). After the Second World War had shattered colonial power as well as the western reputation of military superiority, the Netherlands and Great Britain sought to re-establish colonial rule in the former Netherlands-Indies and Malaya by force. These campaigns sooner or later transformed into quests for a strategy to leave the colonial possession on conditions that were acceptable to the former colonial power. The case of New Guinea elaborates on the endgame of Dutch colonial presence in Asia that was first challenged in the 1945-1949 period. The American Vietnam War continued the French Indochina War in the Vietnamese theatre until Washington had to admit that its goals were unattainable and that an orderly withdrawal was the better choice.

Although they share the international context of the Cold War these four cases present marked differences that may serve to deepen our understanding of military exits. The Malayan Emergency is generally regarded as the benchmark of a successful exit in sharp contrast with the humiliating withdrawal of the United States (US) from Vietnam. The Dutch-Indonesian War and New Guinea represent Dutch historical experiences with exits. Together these four case studies offer insights in the political and military conduct of a small power (the Netherlands), a super power (the United States) and a great power in decline (Great Britain).

The focus will be on the making of strategy.¹ Strategy is commonly understood as the use of the military instrument to further political purposes within the general framework of a chosen policy. But this is a rather one-dimensional, linear and unimaginative definition as it describes strategy as a subordinate and instrumental activity in the hands of the political leadership alone. This negates the true nature of both war and the military instrument. We would be better served by remembering the time-honoured dictum of the German chief of the General Staff Helmuth von Moltke the Elder that no campaign plan survives the first encounter with the enemy. By this he implied that wars are decided not by their desired end state but on the contrary by their starting point and by the ensuing process of decision-making and fighting against the enemy on a day-to-day basis. He understood that operational victories could dictate strategic realities. When strategy-making is conceived of as an iterative and dynamic process aimed at the realisation of one's interests and objectives in direct confrontation with an enemy in which every stroke will be met by a counterstroke, we begin to understand why at some point the political objectives may have to be adapted to the vicissitudes and possibilities of the battlefield and not the other way around. Making strategy will thus never be simple. Exit strategies, for their paradoxical nature, are an intriguing case in point as the cases discussed below will show.

2.2 EXIT STRATEGY AND THE DUTCH-INDONESIAN WAR 1945-1949

On the day Japan capitulated, 15 August 1945, allied forces had not yet arrived on the key Indonesian islands of Java and Sumatra. Two days later Indonesian nationalists led by Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta declared

¹ Literature on strategy is abundant. This section in particular pays tribute to: Luttwak 2001, Strachan 2013 and Lonsdale 2008.

the *Republik Indonesia*. When British forces arrived six weeks later, they lacked manpower and only occupied six key areas. All authority beyond the enclaves was given to the Japanese army and the Republic. As chaos reigned and Indonesian young militants slaughtered thousands of Dutch and their perceived sympathisers, the Japanese surrendered large quantities of arms to nationalist battle groups and the balance of power shifted towards the new Republic.²

The Dutch, who had returned to the outer areas of the archipelago, lacked the means to suppress the Republic and had difficulty adapting to the realities on the ground. When news of the declaration of independence reached the Netherlands the majority of the Dutch parliament and population considered the nationalists an unrepresentative minority of the Indonesian population. They desired to restore colonial authority in Indonesia as its revenues were needed for the Dutch post-war reconstruction. The army leadership and the Indo-European community (people of mixed descent) particularly pressed for decisive military action. A minority was open to the more moderate demands of the Indonesians but both sides were appalled by the nationalists' revolutionary zeal and the state of lawlessness in the Indies.

On the Indonesian side, militant parties and a new Indonesian army pressurised their government. Accordingly, policy-makers and negotiators on both sides had little room for manoeuvre. Numerous minor military confrontations between Indonesian and Dutch forces, shipped in from 1946, followed and two times the Dutch decided on a large-scale military offensive to impose their will on the Republic. This leads to the question whether a Dutch exit strategy existed during the turbulent years 1945-1949, and if so, why and how it evolved.

In the process that finally ended in a Dutch withdrawal from its colony in 1949, four phases can be discerned. During the first phase, the highest-ranking Dutch official in place, Lieutenant-Governor-General Hubertus van Mook was far ahead of his government when he indicated a willingness to negotiate with the Indonesian nationalists on reforms within the colonial framework. Their leaders however refused to talk out of fear of their revolutionary militants. The British wanted to leave but only after an agreement

² De Jong 1988, pp 79-89. MacMillan 2005, p 60. This exposé is based primarily on the detailed reconstructions of the negotiations by JJP de Jong on the initial and final years of decolonisation, the outline of the military and policy intentions of General Spoor by JA de Moor and the very useful analysis of Dutch military planning and the theme guerrilla versus pacification by PMH Groen. De Jong 1988, 2011, 2015. De Moor 2011. Groen 1991.

was reached between the two sides. They now sided with the Dutch and intervened in order to evacuate Dutch internees from Republican-controlled areas. However, they suffered severe losses against Indonesian militants in battles in Surabaya and Central Java and could only continue their evacuations after receiving reinforcements.³ The victories increased the power of militant groups and the new Indonesian army, further limiting the room for manoeuvring of Sukarno and Hatta.

2.2.1 *Setting the Stage*

From November 1945 a stalemate ensued.⁴ The Republic controlled major parts of Java and Sumatra while the Dutch controlled almost all other parts of the archipelago. Van Mook, seeing that his promise of internal reforms and an imperial conference in the future was not enough, opted for gradual decolonisation. Grudgingly, the government in The Hague accepted this policy. As the Indonesian government rejected all negotiations under pressure of the Indonesian army and militant parties, Van Mook identified three alternative policies to force them to resume negotiations: international pressure, military action and the threat of unilateral withdrawal, i.e. abandonment.⁵ In support of Van Mook, the British decided to exert pressure on the Republic. They postponed their withdrawal and allowed the entry of Dutch forces on Java and Sumatra that they had ruled out before. From 10 March 1946 Dutch troops landed in the enclaves, expanded the area under their control on West-Java and secured new territories. Indonesian attacks failed to recapture these, in fact, even more territory was lost.⁶ These developments led the Republican government to openly agree to negotiations in defiance of militant and army opposition, but they also raised Dutch conservative expectations of an offensive that could eliminate the extremist Republic.

Van Mook and Indonesian Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir drafted a plan for gradual decolonisation. The Dutch would *de facto* recognise the Republic on Java and Sumatra and independence would be granted after an interim period. Independent Indonesia would become a federal state. The agreement met with stiff resistance from the Dutch conservatives and the Indonesian revolutionaries. Sjahrir was even temporarily kidnapped by Indonesian army supporters that feared a betrayal of the Indonesian revo-

³ MacMillan 2005, pp 26-58.

⁴ De Jong 2015, pp 41, 43, 44.

⁵ De Jong 2015, pp 50, 68-70.

⁶ Groen 1991, pp 67, 79; De Jong 1988, pp 245-252.

lution. Importantly though, the Dutch government for the first time accepted the Republic's *de facto* existence and supported gradual decolonisation.⁷

2.2.2 *Between Negotiations and All-out War*

The second phase from May 1946 to August 1947 was marked by ongoing negotiations on how to implement the course of gradual decolonisation and a parallel military escalation into a first military action. During this period skirmishes continued between the Indonesian and Dutch armies along the borders of the Dutch pockets and Van Mook lost confidence in the Republican leadership. To increase the pressure on them he devised a fourth policy alternative: the Dutch would create a federated Indonesian state under Dutch supervision, which would force the republic to co-operate or to be marginalised. Nonetheless, he immediately cancelled further proceedings when British pressure on the Republic had the effect of bringing it back to the negotiating table, the alternative being a war against increasing numbers of Dutch forces. British pressure also resulted in a ceasefire and talks resumed in the town of Linggadjati. After long-drawn negotiations the two sides agreed upon *de facto* recognition of the Republic, the formation of a government of representatives of the Republic and the outer regions' states during an interim period and the construction of an independent, sovereign federated United States of Indonesia under the aegis of a Dutch-Indonesian Union that could be abolished after a fixed number of years, if so desired. The negotiators also agreed that during the interim period the Dutch colonial army (KNIL) and the Indonesian forces would merge into a new federal gendarmerie. Most important of all, along this path of gradual decolonisation the Republic and the Netherlands would be equal partners.

However, the Dutch parliament and the conservative cabinet members opined that the Dutch delegation and Van Mook had acted beyond their mandate. The Dutch government now reinterpreted the agreement on some essential points⁸: the Dutch-Indonesian Union could not be terminated, the Republic was to accept a subordinate role and there would be no infringements on Dutch sovereignty during the interim period. The Republic refused to accept the Dutch amendments and the agreement came to naught. In the following weeks, tensions rose. Indonesian units infiltrated the Dutch areas, ignored a Dutch ultimatum to withdraw and the

⁷ De Jong 2015, pp 70-72, 75, 76.

⁸ De Jong 2015, pp 76-80, 84, 87-97.

Indonesian Commander-in-Chief, General Sudirman called the Indonesian army to arms. His Dutch counterpart General Simon Spoor quietly bypassed Van Mook's defensive orders and conducted several offensive actions. He also tried to influence the Dutch Prime Minister Louis Beel away from the Linggadjati-agreement and further negotiations. Although a new cease-fire was agreed upon in late January 1947, the Beel-government now conferred with Spoor about a full-blown offensive.⁹

Paradoxically, the Dutch cabinet around the same time realised that they could only sustain their army in Indonesia until the end of the year. Without a political solution the United States and Great Britain refused to offer any loans.¹⁰ A Republican blockade of supplies aggravated the Dutch logistical position within the enclaves. Van Mook manoeuvred towards the terms of the original agreement. An imminent government crisis and the American refusal of financial aid gave the Dutch a final push, while the Indonesians expected international support. Out of expediency rather than conviction, the Dutch government signed the Linggadjati Agreement on 25 March 1947.¹¹ Soon afterwards, the Republic was granted *de facto* recognition by the United States, Great Britain and other countries.

Not surprisingly, under pressure of the army, the Indonesian cabinet rejected Linggadjati. The Dutch still lacked finances and the fresh international recognition led to Republican hubris. The Indonesians demanded a withdrawal of Dutch troops in exchange for a lift of the blockade. Moreover, they opposed the merger of the KNIL and Indonesian forces into a joint gendarmerie. The Dutch conservatives were not pleased with the Linggadjati-agreement either. They successfully steered the cabinet Beel on a conservative course. Spoor's reasoning that the Agreement meant that the Indonesian armed forces would be dissolved and its personnel integrated in the new gendarmerie under the supervision of the KNIL was made Dutch policy. For their part the Indonesians could not accept this interpretation as it endangered the very existence of the Republic.¹² Thus, the Republic ignored a Dutch ultimatum to agree and Van Mook ordered *Operation Product* (the first military action).

From late July 1947 the Dutch army conquered economically important areas and averted an impending bankruptcy. The Dutch paid their army

⁹ De Moor 2011, pp 232-235; De Jong 1988, p 326; De Jong 2015, pp 98-101.

¹⁰ With the Dutch economy in ruins the government was hard-pressed for money. Foreign loans would serve to pay war debts and the maintenance of the armed forces in Indonesia.

¹¹ De Moor 2011, pp 247, 248. Conclusion by De Jong 2015, pp 104-107.

¹² De Moor 2011, pp 250-251.

with foreign exchange for the products of the new areas, the sale of the Indonesian gold deposit and Marshall Aid to the Netherlands and Indonesia. In so doing the Dutch extended their breath for gradual decolonisation. Although the Indonesians suffered losses, they extracted and regrouped.¹³ After the conventional offensive, General Spoor conducted counterinsurgency operations to pacify the conquered territories, but his troops could not secure these.

Apart from economic motives, *Product's* political goal was to strengthen the Republican moderates against the hardliners. Initially the aim was to conquer their capital, Jogjakarta, and link up with moderates that were willing to form an alternate, cooperative government. Although the Americans formally opposed the Dutch offensive, they left them ample time to achieve such an objective. However, the Social Democrats in the Dutch cabinet wanted a limited operation only and forced it to stop on August 4 1947.

2.2.3 *Imperial Overstretch*

In the third phase from August 1947 to December 1948 the Dutch government intensified its policy of gradual decolonisation on Dutch terms. This was fiercely opposed by the Republic, that wanted the Dutch to accept *their* terms. These incompatible views would lead to a second Dutch military action. In the summer of 1947, Dutch Foreign Minister Eelco van Kleffens asked the Security Council for international mediation in support of Dutch efforts. The Security Council adopted a resolution to halt the offensive and it also appointed an intermediary committee. Since August 1947 this Committee of Good Services (CGD) and the United States intensively involved themselves in the Dutch decolonisation policy.¹⁴ Meanwhile Van Mook accelerated the founding of the (sub)states in the outer regions. If necessary, the federation of the United States of Indonesia could be completed without any accordance of the Republic. In this way, the Dutch conservatives hoped to maximise the Dutch influence in the ongoing decolonisation.

The involvement of the CGD and the United States led to resumed Dutch-Indonesian negotiations on board the *USS Renville* early December 1947. The US State Department managed to put the CGD on a pro-Dutch course on the basis of Linggadjati. It wanted the Netherlands to focus on the rising communist threat in Europe and an end to the Indonesian con-

¹³ De Jong 2015, pp 120-125; Groen 1991, pp 100-106 and 116-119.

¹⁴ De Jong 2015, pp 127-131.

flict was a prerequisite for that. Faced with the threat of a new military action, the Republican delegation signed the Renville Agreement in January 1948. While recognising the recent Dutch conquests, the Agreement called for the implementation of the Linggadjati Accord, to be more precise, the Dutch interpretation of it: the interim government would be installed under Dutch sovereignty; the Republic joined a federation that became part of a substantial Dutch-Indonesian Union; the Dutch claimed a clear political-military role after the transfer of sovereignty.¹⁵

Indonesian hardliners forced the Republic to reject the agreement. By contrast, the Dutch cabinet and the Crown's High Representative Beel who had succeeded Van Mook took Linggadjati and Renville as a starting point and hoped that after a second military action moderate Republicans would assume power. Thus, under Dutch supervision, a 'sanitised' Republic and the outer regions' states would produce a federation under a Dutch-Indonesian Union.

Meanwhile, the Indonesian High Command prepared for a large-scale guerrilla. Since June 1948 it had established a so-called people's defence system, wherein towns and communities led by local authorities would provide intelligence, supplies, shelter and recruits.¹⁶ Again the Republicans started to infiltrate the Dutch occupied areas and tensions rose. The Dutch cabinet forwarded several proposals to the Republic, which were considered 'neo-colonial'. From May until September 1948 the United States shifted their support from the Netherlands to the Republic, stimulated by the fact that Dutch actions angered Washington: in one of the proposals mentioned above, General Spoor again insisted on the dissolution of the Indonesian army and Dutch supervision of the joint gendarmerie. This was met by fierce resistance from the Indonesian cabinet, but the US State Department was outraged as well.¹⁷ The Dutch government also ignored several American proposals and their relations gradually deteriorated. At this junction, the Indonesians struck down a communist uprising, which Washington interpreted as a sign that the republic's leaders were responsible men that would not turn to Moscow for aid. To break the deadlock, the Dutch cabinet saw only one solution: a second military action.

This action, *Operation Kraai*, started on 19 December 1948. The Dutch troops pursued Spoor's threefold strategy: turnover the political and mili-

¹⁵ De Jong 2015, pp 144-156.

¹⁶ Bouman 2006, p 212; Nasution 1970, pp 105-119; Van der Wall en Drooglever 1971-1995, Volume 16, Kleine Serie 70, pp 701-704; Volume 19, Kleine Serie 77, pp 298-299; Volume 20 Kleine Serie 80 p 20; Cribb 2001, pp 143-154.

¹⁷ De Moor 2011, pp 329-331; De Jong 2015, pp 170-173.

tary leadership of the Republic, occupy the main political and military centres, and encircle and annihilate enemy concentrations. Within days, they had conquered Jogjakarta and captured almost the entire Republican government, including Sukarno and Hatta. However, the Indonesian High Command escaped and they and an emergency government in Sumatra continued to lead their units in battle, that largely managed to avoid engagements and regrouped.¹⁸

The Security Council and the United States demanded the immediate cessation of hostilities, the release of the Republican leaders and fresh negotiations. Spoor and the conservative members of cabinet were initially able to block the resumption of talks. They firmly opposed the restoration of the Republic and the return of its leaders to Jogjakarta. According to High Representative Beel an interim government could be formed from moderate Republicans and Federalists and the Republic could be reduced to a minor state on Central Java. Inquiries learned however that even they did not support such a solution, and this realisation ended all conservative opposition. Social Democratic Prime Minister Willem Drees swiftly launched a roadmap for an interim government in January 1949, elections in July 1949 and the transfer of sovereignty on 1 January 1950. In support, the United States inserted this plan in a resolution of the Security Council that repeated their demands on 28 January 1949.¹⁹ By this time it had become questionable whether decolonisation on Dutch terms (whatever they were) was still possible, as *Operation Kraai* had failed in luring moderate Republicans to cooperate with the Dutch.

2.2.4 *End Game*

In the ensuing fourth phase from January 1949 to December 1949, the fatal political effects of the second military action led the Dutch government to opt for an immediate departure of the archipelago, but it discovered that the implementation of this radical course was still hard to achieve. From January 1949, the Indonesian army stepped up its guerrilla activities, supported by its people's defence system. The Dutch forces tried to patrol and secure enormous areas, but this dispersed, exhausted and demoralised their men. Increasingly out of touch with political realities, General Spoor continued to send rosy reports to the Dutch government in order to gain

¹⁸ Groen 1991, pp 178-195.

¹⁹ De Jong 2015, pp 201-206.

more time for pacification, but these increasingly annoyed the parliament and the cabinet and isolated him.²⁰

Under these circumstances, Prime Minister Drees saw no other option than an immediate abandonment of Indonesia and accepted a plan developed earlier by Beel. Ironically, the Security Council and the United States that continued to prefer a gradual decolonisation, fiercely opposed this. They regarded the plan as a suspicious circumvention of the Security Council. The Dutch had to focus on the resolution, release the Republican leaders and recognise the Republic. It was the Federalists of the outer regions that helped find a way out of this deadlock. They now offered to work with the Dutch towards a United States of Indonesia without the Republic. Fearful of being marginalised, the Republicans got second thoughts and approved the idea of a Round Table Conference (RTC) and a ceasefire in return for the release of its leaders and recognition. Eventually, the Security Council and the United States also expressed support, but it had taken considerable effort. In fact, Foreign Minister Stikker had threatened that the Netherlands might have to rethink accession to NATO.²¹

By this time, both the Republicans and the Dutch had come to recognise the strategic stalemate. The Indonesians could rarely destroy Dutch patrols and outposts and their attacks on towns were easily repelled, whereas the Dutch troops were scattered over large and uncontrollable areas. Indonesian Acting Chief-of-Staff, Colonel Tahi Bonar Simatupang expected that the war would devastate the country in the long run.²² This understanding eroded domestic resistance to a final RTC, which was duly agreed upon in May 1949.

The RTC Agreement subsequently led to a ceasefire in August, the Dutch evacuation of Jogjakarta and newly occupied areas of the second action, the restoration of the Republic and return of its leaders. The Indo-European community, large stretches of Dutch public opinion and the armed forces were appalled. As abandonment and the May 1949 Van Roijen-Roem Agreement removed the need for an interim period and an interim government, the RTC focused on several important issues. The Dutch and Indonesian delegations decided to split the war debt and agreed on the creation of a 'light' Dutch-Indonesian Union. After long discussions, they also agreed on the issue of the federal army. The KNIL and the regular Dutch army would stay for another six months in the archipelago, after

²⁰ Groen 1991, pp 219-223; De Moor 2011, pp 351-361.

²¹ Conclusion by De Jong 2015, pp 211-220.

²² Simatupang's important change of direction is emphasised in De Jong 2011, pp 471, 620-623 and 626; Simatupang 1985, pp 60, 61.

which the KNIL would dissolve. Its personnel could choose between honourable discharge and enlistment in either the Dutch or the Indonesian army, which would become the new federal army. New Guinea was excluded from the transfer in order to make the bargain more palatable to Dutch parliament. Skirmishes continued but the Dutch forces duly withdrew to their predestined concentration areas.²³ On 27 December 1949, the Netherlands transferred sovereignty over the archipelago to the United States of Indonesia.

2.2.5 *Concluding Remarks*

In view of this it is indeed possible to speak of an exit strategy. After the government gave up the idea of re-colonisation, Lieutenant-Governor-General Van Mook, by favouring negotiations with the Republic and by identifying alternative policies to force them to negotiate on decolonisation on Dutch terms, in fact devised an exit strategy. However, the Indonesian and Dutch armies to a large extent operated in pursuit of their own agendas, as both General Spoor and General Sudirman acted as political generals, both in the field and in their opposition to agreements reached by negotiators and politicians. The same applied to the Dutch conservatives and Indonesian radical youth. These factors regularly paralysed efforts to find a political solution that satisfied Dutch interests and Indonesian aspirations.²⁴ Van Mook's initial three levers of the international pressure, the federal alternative and military pressure indeed led to negotiations. But international pressure could also turn against the Dutch, or work in favour of their opponents. The Dutch also missed policy options such as when they did not pursue a federal alternative without the Republic in 1946. Their military presence in the enclaves enabled the Dutch to start negotiations with the Indonesian Republic, but the application of violence did not fully bring about the desired outcome. In the first military action the Dutch could have been close to a formation of a moderate Republic. However, as the second military action shows, it could easily become counter-productive. This second military action ended in complete political failure and only abandonment remained.

²³ De Jong 2011, pp 641-647, 650-661. De Jong 2015, pp 285-290.

²⁴ De Jong 2015, pp 294-297.

2.3 'A MIXTURE OF FORCE AND CONSENT'. DECOLONISATION, MALAYA AND THE BRITISH EXIT STRATEGY 1945-1960

In a famous essay, reflecting on the essence of state power, David Hume argued that ultimately it all boiled down to 'a mixture of force and consent'.²⁵ There is much to be said for the idea that the character of the British Empire, whether at its high-water mark or in decline, benefits from being analysed from this perspective that is unassuming as it is appropriate.

However, the line of thought has traditionally been that the British, after they transformed the commerce-based colonialism into a modern form of imperialism, stressed predominantly indirect rule and 'typically British minimal force', i.e. consent. It is commonly held that in general cooperation with local elites and imperial policing (a term coined by Charles Gwynn) were favoured over small wars (Charles Edward Callwell), most certainly in Southeast Asia. The disintegration of the British Empire after 1945 has been characterised along similar lines. After World War Two Great Britain granted independence to about 700 million colonial subjects in less than fifteen years. At the same time British strategic interests (geostrategic, maritime and commercial) were secured. Great Britain also continued to benefit economically within the context of the Commonwealth. It still had military influence in the region. According to the mainstream of interpretations until the 1990s this could be explained – again – by accentuating the British timely acceptance of self-governance and independence during the decolonisation process and a unique British way of counterinsurgency focussing on minimal force that accompanied exit strategies based on mutual consent.

Since the 1990s however these ideas on the British colonial exit have been seriously challenged.²⁶ About the apparently benign nature of the related British counterinsurgency the same can be said.²⁷ Revisionists have claimed that the successful and relatively peaceful British exit was essentially an 'a posteriori rationalisation'. Great Britain seemed to have been *pushed out*. It refused to accept the process of decolonisation initially and responded with fruitless improvisations. The operations supposed to coun-

²⁵ Hume 1998, p 30.

²⁶ Hyam 2007; Louis 2006; White 1999; Fischer and Morris-Jones 2012; Shipway 2008; Thomas 2014; Darwin 2006.

²⁷ Next to (classic) studies of experts such as Porch, Beckett, Townshend, Newsinger, Mockaitis, Nagl and French, see Dixon 2012, Hughes 2013, the special issues of the *Journal of Strategic Studies* 2009 and *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 2012.

ter the troubles that heralded the end of the British Empire were characterised as mismanaged disasters and reactive defeats.²⁸ Many studies have also emphasised the systematic violence that accompanied them.²⁹

In this respect, Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon's *Imperial Endgame* is very thought-provoking.³⁰ This study presents the reader with an interesting attempt to correct both: the former overly rosy picture and the more recent theory of the revisionists. Grob-Fitzgibbon elaborated on the complex, but often overlooked, interrelationship between 'consent' and 'force'. With regard to Asia, the Colonial Office developed an exit strategy very early on, according to Grob-Fitzgibbon.³¹ It had many violent conflicts to manage simultaneously and officers and civil servants rotated between the problem areas. This, in combination with the dominant opinions on decolonisation within the Labour government, favoured an early coherent imperial strategy to accompany the withdrawal from the colonies by uniting the ex-colonies into a Commonwealth.

At the same time, the actual process was much more violent than has been assumed so far. Decolonisation had no self-forgetful idealistic background, but had neo-colonial forms of dependence to create. Independence movements could count on British support and recognition only as long as they remained democratic, liberal and western-oriented. Those that were so unwise as to frustrate the trend toward freedom and self-determination faced the British stick instead of the carrot. The last sentences of Grob-Fitzgibbon's epilogue are revealing: "If there is one clear conclusion to be drawn from the end of Britain's empire, it is that liberal imperialism can only be sustained by illiberal dirty wars. Britain's imperial endgame demonstrates that it is possible to achieve success in each. Whether moral or not is a question left to philosophers and kings".³² In sum, Grob-Fitzgibbon argued that Britain *pulled out* on its own terms, instead of being *pushed out*. And this implied dirty wars and brutal forms of counterinsurgency.

The Malayan Emergency, fought from 1948 to 1960, between Commonwealth armed forces and the insurgents of the Malayan People Liberation Army (MPLA), the military arm of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), may exemplify this rather sobering vision on the relationship between an early British colonial exit strategy and (brutal) behaviour of British-led

²⁸ Hyam 2007.

²⁹ The decolonisation of Kenya particularly opened the eyes for the pain and suffering behind the supposedly 'British way decolonisation'. Elkins 2006.

³⁰ Grob-Fitzgibbon 2011.

³¹ Darwin 2012; Heinlein 2013; Husain 2014; Furedi 1993.

³² Grob-Fitzgibbon 2011, p 377.

security forces. Recent studies, in particular those of Karl Hack, indeed have suggested that the classic case of the British counterinsurgency needs to be re-evaluated along these lines.³³ A short recapitulation of the four distinct phases of the conflict in Malaya (1945-1948, 1948-1951, 1951-1954 and 1954-1960) may illustrate this.

2.3.1 *Reconstructing the Empire*

Obviously the return of the British in 1945, after three years of Japanese occupation, was challenging. The economy in Malaya lay in shatters, not to mention the sorry state of the British financial situation itself that resembled something close to bankruptcy. The international balance of power also had shifted significantly with the dominance of the US now evident. The Cold War was imminent. Military assets to recapture the colonies were hardly available. In the meantime, stimulated by the intellectual and socio-economic developments before 1942 and by Japanese occupation, in Malaya a stronger desire for self-government and independence than before the war had developed. Still, the new Malayan elite and middle-class were generally pleased to welcome back the British. What is more, the majority of the (Malay) population approved of the provisional British Military Administration for the Princely States of Malaya, because it considered security, peace and order to be requirements for restoration of the power of the old sultanates and as a safeguard against Chinese dominance (about 40 per cent of the population).

Independence or even colonial self-rule was initially not really taken into serious consideration by the British authorities, although the developments in India of course were a strong hint as to the direction foreign and colonial policy were heading. The main effort in 1945-1946 in Malaya amounted to reoccupying the country and guaranteeing law and order, until a new civilian High Commissioner would negotiate a new power arrangement with the elite of the country.³⁴ Subsequently the British seem to have blundered on the political level. In order to break the old princely powers in Malaya and rationalise the administration in 1946-1947, Great Britain tried to establish a Malayan Union based on equality between races. This caused political turmoil. Traditional Malay opposed to the weakening of the traditional Malay rulers. The new socio-economic Malay elite united itself in UMNO (United Malays National Organisation). The Chinese particularly were furious, since the Malay tried to keep them out of

³³ Hack 2015, 2012, 2009a, 2009b.

³⁴ Miroiu (n.d.), pp 8-10.

the political process altogether. This resulted in a political alternative that ironically – and initially unintendedly – resulted in a political solution that eventually facilitated the British transfer of power to the Malay significantly. Negotiations resulted in the Federation of Malaya (1 February 1948). This federation restored the (ceremonial) autonomy of the rulers of the Malay states. But it created first and foremost a political framework in which UMNO would become dominant. Eventually this construction would ensure both Malay independence and British influence.

So the federation worked, where it backfired in the Dutch East Indies. Chinese communists in the meantime started fighting this federation. Only ten per cent of the Chinese qualified for citizenship and they suffered many socio-economic disadvantages. The Chinese assumed that the British were on a course of divide and rule in order to postpone independence. Initially, they opposed non-violently. Chinese-dominated trade unions organised strikes (as many as 300 in 1947). Protesters met with harsh countermeasures including arrests and deportations. In reaction they became increasingly militant. The first real attacks of the MCP/MPLA came on 16 June 1948 when three European plantation managers were killed. Police violence was considerable, which is exemplified by the killing of eight labourers during riots, earlier in June. From then on guerrilla operations increased, resulting in a string of hit-and-run actions and assassinations of plantation managers.

2.3.2 *Slash and Burn*

It could very well be argued that, seen from the perspective of the British exit (strategy), the period directly following all this (1948-1950/51) was the decisive phase. Traditionally, the later years (1950-1954) are highlighted because it is accepted wisdom that the sophisticated British counterinsurgency of the Briggs-Templer years was critical and effective. On second thought however one has to acknowledge that many of the preconditions for success were already initiated *before* 1950. A state of emergency was proclaimed throughout (the federation of) Malaya, banning the Malayan Communist Party and other parties. The police arrested hundreds of militants already in 1948-1949 and was given the power to imprison without trial. A new legal framework allowed the British to operate almost with impunity. The United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the provisions of the Geneva conventions were appreciated as non-binding documents. It resulted in harsh treatment of suspects and prisoners of war who regularly were denied the status of legal combatants. The emergency regulations legalised deportations, resettlement and destruction

of property. They even allowed for indefinite detention of suspected sympathisers of the MCP without trial.³⁵

Collective punishments occurred fairly indiscriminately, just as relocations of complete villages and the systematic burning of homes, fields and crops. In 1949 alone, 6,000 people were detained in the context of collective preventive arrests. 1,200 communist suspects were deported to China.³⁶ The point to make is that although the Emergency in Malaya has become synonymous with winning *hearts and minds*, in this important initial phase of the conflict (1948-50/51) this certainly did not apply to actual and suspected insurgents.³⁷ And although it goes without saying that the insurgency was not crushed yet, this prompt response in terms of arrests, deportations and police actions seems to have been much more effective than is often thought. Safeguarding the Malay heartland immediately secured a reasonable degree of safety and order in key areas.

This policy was reinforced by a spectacular build-up of security forces (with a very strong focus on 'Malayan' police) in order to definitely secure the west coast where the mines, plantations and important cities were located. Already in 1948-1949, Chinese-dominated trade unions and communist networks were in disarray and the MCP was forced out of the key areas and cities. The build-up allowed the government to deny the (approximately 8,000) communist insurgents the possibility of occupying safe bases in inhabited areas and thus forced them to retreat to the jungle. Shortly thereafter the British concluded that it was of critical importance to tackle the Chinese communities that lived in the vicinity of the jungle in which the insurgents had retreated, and that provided them with food and information. The strategy they developed aimed to separate the insurgents from their support network.³⁸ It amounted to the forced relocation of more than 500,000 Malaysians, of which 400,000 were Chinese, from communities on the fringes of the forests into guarded camps. By 1951, 423,000 Chinese had already been placed in 410 New Villages, and 650,000 mineworkers and labourers had been resettled in fenced villages that 'protected' them from insurgents. These internal deportations on the orders of High Commissioner Sir Henry Gurney amounted to about half the Chinese community in Malaya. They seem to have been the most important factor in British success.³⁹

³⁵ Miroiu (n.d.), p 10.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Smith 2001, Stubbs 1990; 2004.

³⁸ Miroiu (n.d.), p 11.

³⁹ Hack 2009b, pp 411-414.

On the political level developments before 1950-1951 were equally far-reaching. Military textbooks and articles that discuss counterinsurgency in Malaya rarely mention them, but the fact that the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) that favoured collaboration with UMNO emerged as a political vehicle for moderate Chinese and the Chinese commercial elite was really momentous. It was within *this* context that the British in 1949 announced that Malaya would become independent and granted forms of self-governance.

2.3.3 *The Pay-off*

Still, the years 1950-1951 saw the high watermark of the insurgency. On 6 October 1951 Gurney was ambushed and killed. Even so, it could however very well be argued that the famous third phase of the Emergency, the phase of the well-known counterinsurgency plan of Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Briggs, and its implementation by Lieutenant-General Sir Gerald Templer (1950-1954), was essentially a period of endorsement and enforcement of older ideas. They decided against an overhaul of the political and military exit strategy. Instead, they coherently applied prior ideas and practices on the military operational and tactical level and harshly and effectively stepped up their application.

Admittedly, Templer marked a turning point in the sense that during his command the incident rate fell from 500 to less than 100 per month. His military innovations have become very well-known: joint operational committees, local trackers, sweeps in the jungle with small units, training of home guards, psy ops, *hearts and minds* operations, etc. Seen from the perspective of exit strategies, however, Templer implemented first and foremost an integrated counterinsurgency strategy that continued the isolation and separation of guerrillas and population and denied the insurgents access to food supplies and information.

In retrospect the population control plans and food denial strategy stemming from the late 1940s seem to have paid off afterwards. The tranquillity they generated made the fabled *hearts and minds* campaign of Templer possible, not the other way around. This allowed him also to fine-tune his military strategy and the British political (exit) strategy. Templer could do that because he was the successor to both Gurney and Briggs. He was Director of Operations (military commander) *and* High Commissioner simultaneously. With almost proconsular authority Templer could both fight the Chinese communists and at the same time push for self-governance.

This eventually significantly stimulated the political developments. Between 1952 and 1955 elections on municipal and state level were organised in which the UMNO-MCA Alliance (Malay/Chinese) won important victories. When the country was relatively quiet again in 1954, this gave the Malay politicians further opportunity to come to the fore. A sudden acceleration in the pace of decolonisation occurred, with its own complex dynamics. Fascinatingly by then the British somewhat seem to have lost control. In a period of nation-wide elections and enhanced self-government UMNO and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) took over the initiative. The MCA accepted UMNO predominance in the Alliance in return for influence on policy and economic activities, and respect for their rights. Together they started to oppose the British Emergency that they felt to be the major hindrance to independence. This unexpected assertiveness resulted in a refusal to cooperate in British committees, in pleas for amnesty for the communists and in (failed) negotiations with MCP leader Chin Peng at the English School at Baling on 28-29 December 1955.⁴⁰ During 1955 and 1956 UMNO, the MCA and the British eventually worked out a constitutional settlement. The Federation was granted full independence on 31 August 1957. Almost three years later, on 31 July 1960, the Malayan government declared the state of emergency to be over.

With that, the Malay and the Chinese commercial elite triumphed, but, for that matter, so did the British. Independent Malaya joined the Commonwealth and thus remained within the western sphere of influence. British troops could stay in the region and trained the Malayan army; at the same time they defended Britain's geopolitical interests. In 1964 its military presence in Malaysia/Singapore still was the largest and most expensive component of Britain's role world-wide and the Royal Navy operated from Singapore until 1971. The British exit also paid off economically as British companies were allowed to operate as before.⁴¹ The geopolitical, economic and military interests of Great Britain were thus safeguarded.

2.3.4 *Concluding Remarks*

In sum, the British exit strategy could be designated as successful in Malaya. But this exit had a different route *and* character than is normally assigned to it. The independence of Malaya seems to have been decided in a remarkably early stage, sometime during 1948 and 1949. The bulk of the

⁴⁰ Karl Hack 2011a.

⁴¹ White 2012.

studies on the Emergency discuss the military dimension after the arrival of Briggs and Templer in 1951-1952, focussing on the winning of *hearts and minds*. As Karl Hack, the acknowledged authority on Malaya argues, apart from the fact that the insurgency had inherent weaknesses since it almost exclusively relied on Chinese support, the high force levels used in holding and securing populated areas before 1951 were critical, as were the early deportations of communists, and the detention of potential political activists, population control, resettlement and harsh food policy, plus the extremely coercive aspects of the campaign.⁴² From 1948 onwards the British troops were instructed to torch huts systematically, destroy any food or any cultivated fields to ensure that returning insurgents would starve. To quote Hack: "the back of the Emergency as high level insurgency was broken in 1950-1952. (But) this happened with a population control and security approach/population and spatial control at a time when winning *hearts and minds*, dynamic leadership, and efficient learning were in their early stages".⁴³ To cite Miroiu who is more explicit: "It was ... a brutal campaign targeting, a specific ethnicity and those allied with it ..."⁴⁴

In all, the fish seems to have been already out of the water to a large extent – to paraphrase Mao's famous terminology – by the time Templer came into office. Grob-Fitzgibbon's interpretation therefore is convincing. Undeniably there was a successful exit strategy for Malaya that had been formulated quite early in the conflict. The British in Malaya headed for an independent Malaya led by a hand-picked elite.⁴⁵ It succeeded because the Malayan-Chinese elite supported this and the federation functioned as a political tool towards independence, for both the Malay and the British. Essentially it boiled down to a consensus between Malay, moderate Chinese and local European commercial, financial and industrial interests. The successful British exit was not so much the consequence of the brilliance of the 'British way of counterinsurgency' after 1950, although this was of great importance, but rather a result of a political and commercial elite's willingness to grant concessions to the former coloniser in the field of trade, industry and military strategy. It also worked because of the British 'imperialism of decolonisation', which resulted in much harsher military actions than is often supposed. There was much 'terror and talking' but it is certain that *both* sides engaged in it.⁴⁶ Indeed, the systematic destruction of crops

⁴² Hack 2011b.

⁴³ Hack 2009b.

⁴⁴ Miroiu (n.d.) pp 9 and 11.

⁴⁵ Miroiu (n.d.) p 29.

⁴⁶ Hack 2001b.

and houses, denial of food to rebels and suspects, mass deportations to New Villages in order to guarantee law and order, can hardly be labelled 'typically British minimal force'.⁴⁷

2.4 THERE AND BACK AGAIN.... HOW THE DUTCH GOT TO COLONISE AND THEN EXIT NEW GUINEA

The question of the future of the Dutch presence in western New Guinea arose in the fall of 1945 and was closely connected yet separate from that concerning the Indonesian archipelago. The situation in western New Guinea was fundamentally different from that of other parts of the archipelago. Unlike the islands in the seas bordering its western shores, New Guinea was Melanesian in character. Culturally and linguistically it had much more in common with inhabitants of the Pacific isles to the east. Actual Dutch control had been slow to penetrate as a result of the island's inhospitable climate and terrain. At that time there were also very few economic incentives to do so. Although missionaries had been active, it was only around the turn of the twentieth century that the Dutch established themselves in present-day Manokwari, Merauke and Jayapura, then called Hollandia. The interior was only brought under partial control.⁴⁸

The Second World War brought massive changes. The Dutch lost control over the archipelago but they managed to hold the southern tip of New Guinea. Meanwhile, both General Douglas MacArthur's promise to return to Manila and Japan's aims in the South Pacific gave the island a strategic importance it had never possessed before. Japan greatly expanded the harbour facilities of Jayapura as did MacArthur after he liberated it in 1944. Dutch colonial rule returned in his wake although, for the time being, it was formally called the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration. From what we know, the native population seemed to have welcomed this return. To the extent that the native population had developed a political awareness, Indonesian nationalism was highly unpopular as it displayed a racist bias against the native Papua population. Thus when, in August 1945, Indonesian nationalists in Jakarta proclaimed independence, Dutch control over western New Guinea was unshaken and in fact more popular than

⁴⁷ Hack 2009b; Hale 2013. Relevant British documents are (to be) published in the 'British Documents on the End of Empire Series'. See: <http://www.sas.ac.uk/commonwealthstudies/research/bdeep.html>. Accessed 29 February 2015.

⁴⁸ Droogleever 2005, p 114; Rollings 2010, pp 30-31.

before the war.⁴⁹ This, as we have seen, was entirely different in more developed parts of the archipelago, especially Java and Sumatra.

By 1946, the Dutch government in principle had accepted independence for Indonesia, but in view of its different character and modest level of political development New Guinea was to remain Dutch until it could decide on its future. In 1949, the Dutch formally transferred sovereignty over most of the archipelago to the United States of Indonesia it had constructed. To the chagrin of Jakarta, New Guinea was not transferred at all. This soured relations between the two countries. By the late 1950s, the Indonesian leadership decided to use the issue to oust Dutch companies and economic interests and from 1960 Jakarta threatened to use force to get what it wanted. For a while the Dutch successfully enlisted US support, but the Kennedy Administration preferred a pro-western Indonesia over a continued Dutch involvement, especially so when Jakarta successfully enlisted support and military aid from Moscow. In August 1962, faced with the prospect of invasion and without allies, The Hague agreed to transfer control over New Guinea to the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA), which on 1 May 1963 handed it to Indonesia. Does this mean that the Dutch pursued a coherent exit strategy with regard to New Guinea that was only frustrated by the unwillingness of the Kennedy Administration to let it proceed?

2.4.1 *Toward Papuan Self-determination?*

From 1946, The Hague signalled its willingness to leave. But it also stressed it could not do so now. To raise international support for this approach, The Hague invoked the principle of self-determination that had only recently been enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The Papuans had a right to self-determination, but in view of their development a continued Dutch presence was needed until they could articulate their wishes. This approach was supported by leading Papua intellectuals who opposed a transfer to even a federal state of Indonesia.⁵⁰

In actual fact, the Netherlands actively engaged in the build-up of a Papua civil society. It improved schooling and infrastructure and organised a local police force. It even introduced new crops. Already in 1948 it had started to train a civil service, access to which was only limited to Papuans (that is Javanese and other Indonesians were not granted access).⁵¹ The

⁴⁹ Rollings 2010, p 32; Droogleever 2005, pp 113-114.

⁵⁰ Osborne 1985, pp 14-15, 17.

⁵¹ Visser 2005, p 14.

Dutch rulers allowed political parties to be formed and from 1950 started training a political elite that would be able to lead the country at some future date. These efforts were stepped up by the undersecretary for New Guinea, Theo Bot, who ardently believed in Papuan independence, the date of which was now set to be 1970.

The government also decided to create a Papua Volunteer Guard, an embryonic armed force that for the time being assisted Dutch forces present, but might in time be able to defend the island. Likewise, the Dutch organised municipal elections whereas elections for a New Guinea parliament were held in 1961. This parliament in turn adopted a national flag and anthem, and changed the name of the area into West Papua (but curiously enough kept the name *Hollandia*). All these developments and activities were duly reported to the United Nations in accordance with the provisions on non-self-governing territories⁵² and seemingly in line with its avowed policy.

However, at least in the late 1940s (and probably also after 1957 when Indonesia nationalised Dutch enterprises) Dutch policy-makers also saw New Guinea as the new homeland of thousands of Indo-Europeans who did not want to live in an independent Indonesia or felt forced to leave.⁵³ This goal was hard to reconcile with the idea of Papua self-determination since it would have significantly altered the composition of the population and would have created additional complications for a Dutch exit. Not surprisingly, Papuans opposed the preferential treatment of the Indo-Europeans.⁵⁴

Secondly, the continued Dutch presence in New Guinea was also a means to 'sell' the loss of Indonesia to the Dutch parliament and general public. At least part of the empire had been saved from the wreckage. In view of this it is unlikely that the Dutch intended to leave soon. In fact, when in 1951 Foreign Affairs Minister Dirk Stikker suggested leaving New Guinea this caused the downfall of the cabinet and ended his career in the domestic political arena. Likewise, in 1960, Prime Minister Jan de Quay encountered much domestic criticism at his suggestion that the administration of New Guinea might be internationalised.⁵⁵

Additionally, continued Dutch presence was a core element in Dutch military planning during the 1940s and 1950s – in the late 1940s there was talk of establishing a naval base near Sorong on New Guinea's Bird's

⁵² Saltford 2005, p 60.

⁵³ Penders 2001, p 62.

⁵⁴ Lagerberg 1962, p 128.

⁵⁵ Van den Doel 2011, pp 356-357.

Head Peninsula as the Dutch believed it was they who would be charged with defending the archipelago's external security for years to come. To this end, Dutch conscript units were also to rotate in and out.⁵⁶ Although for financial reasons no such base was ever built and the Dutch role in the defence of Indonesia was limited to the training of a number of Indonesian officers, the argument popped up time and again and seemed to gain strength when Indonesia seemed on the verge of disintegration and communist take-over in the mid-to-late-1950s. The Dutch portrayed New Guinea as a western bulwark against communism, just like Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines. And this, of course, necessitated an indefinite Dutch stay, both political and military.⁵⁷ For a while this won them American diplomatic support – a certain amount at least. Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister Joseph Luns even believed that the Americans had promised military aid to secure the island.

This two-pronged strategy was self-defeating. As Indonesian pressure grew, the Dutch stepped up their efforts at building a viable West Papua. They also increased their military presence. Both cast doubt on their willingness to leave; after all, holding municipal and parliamentary elections defeated the argument that the Papuans were not as yet ready to make such difficult choices.⁵⁸ Moreover, in 1960, a year before the general elections but at a time when Indonesia loudly voiced its claims, the Dutch sent their only aircraft carrier to New Guinea. Its journey there was also meant to be a goodwill trip but the international community, France excepted, generally viewed it as a provocative military move which cast doubt on Dutch intentions, the more so since the *HMS Karel Doorman* carried some twelve jet fighters.⁵⁹

2.4.2 *Internationalisation to Keep Matters in One's Own Hand?*

Meanwhile, the costs of maintaining a credible deterrence were crippling. For instance, the need to protect New Guinea served as an argument to maintain an aircraft carrier. This ship, a remnant of a highly ambitious naval strategy that the Dutch could not afford, did not fit in the Navy's role in NATO but deploying it 'out of area' was a costly affair. Additionally, sending troops to New Guinea impacted on the Dutch contribution to the defence of Western Europe. In all, although the number of troops

⁵⁶ Baudet 2013, pp 83-85.

⁵⁷ Meijer 1994, pp 405 and 458.

⁵⁸ Penders 2001, pp 421-428.

⁵⁹ Hellema 2005, pp 98, 104-106, 115; Hoffenaar and Schoenmaker 1994, p 217.

on the island never exceeded 10,000 personnel at the same time, this was a substantial number for a small country, about one-sixth of the number it contributed to stem a Soviet onslaught. Lastly, since many states denied the Dutch the use of harbours and airfields, logistics were a nightmare and a key weakness in Dutch strategy.

Accordingly, in September 1960, while at a cocktail party, Dutch Prime Minister De Quay suggested that the island could become an international trusteeship with the Dutch as administrators only. This had been considered for some time and seemed attractive because it eased the burden, but the government had not reached agreement on it yet. While this was a bold move on the part of the Prime Minister to regain the initiative, he actually lost it. Since the Dutch still did not want Indonesia to play a role in this internationalisation, Jakarta that before 1960 had tried several times to gain UN support for its position, decided to step up its infiltration.⁶⁰

Growing interest on the part of the Soviet Union that now sent weapons, threatened to make New Guinea a Cold War battlefield. In September 1961, the Dutch formally announced their intentions at the United Nations, but their plan failed to gain acceptance and so the stalemate continued. Meanwhile, Indonesian President Sukarno announced his intention to invade New Guinea. In reaction the Dutch scaled up their patrols on land and at sea and sent out reconnaissance flights. On 15 January 1962 one such aircraft spotted a small Indonesian force of three motor torpedo boats that was heading towards New Guinea and carried around 150 infiltrators. The Indonesians fired at the plane and in response two nearby Dutch frigates sank one vessel and severely damaged another. Rear Admiral Gerard J. Platerink, the Commander-in-Chief of the Dutch forces in New Guinea, now intended to attack Indonesian craft in the port of the nearby Aru Isles in retaliation, but the Dutch government ordered him not to.⁶¹ This points at a mismatch between (short-term) military considerations and long-term political ones, as the political aim was to deter, not to start a war.

At this junction, the Kennedy Administration decided the only way to stem the growing Soviet presence in the area, was to kill the problem and change sides. Indonesia was to be courted to accede to the western camp and the Dutch were told they had to leave.⁶² In April 1962, a new plan was drafted. New Guinea would be temporarily transferred to the UN, but there was still talk of Papuan self-determination. Ostensibly with a view

⁶⁰ Cribb and Brown 1997, p 66.

⁶¹ Steen, van der 2010, pp 68-75.

⁶² Kersten 2010, p 267.

to safeguard this, and to counter the growing number of incursions, the Dutch sent reinforcements, but it was clear that these were too few in number to fight an all-out invasion. As things were, the Dutch, helped by the still modest Papua Volunteer Corps, were able to neutralise the Indonesian infiltrations but this exhausted their capacity.⁶³

The government, however, rejected pleas from the Dutch military to send a higher number of Dutch soldiers because it felt that this would further weaken the Dutch defences in Europe and would be at odds with its desire to reach a diplomatic solution. For the same reason, the government forbade a proposed withdrawal to the southern tip of the isle where a last stand could be made. The Dutch soldiers would have to stay put, but this meant that there was one Dutch soldier for every 42 square kilometres and defences were symbolic at best. It did however stipulate that local commanders could surrender locally, should this have become inevitable.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, the government continued its efforts to elicit international support. By August 1962 however, it was clear that an invasion was imminent and that none of the powers was willing to support the Dutch. Just hours before the planned invasion that even involved Soviet operated submarines, a new agreement was reached under American pressure that installed a UN Transitional Executive Authority (UNTEA) and transferred the island to Indonesia after a brief interim period. Worryingly, the agreement was very vague on the issue of self-determination. If anything, the Papuans were to express themselves *after* the transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia.⁶⁵ In the end, the Netherlands had to accept all it had tried to prevent since 1946.

On 1 October 1962, UNTEA stepped in. In the preceding weeks, Undersecretary Bot had tried to convince Dutch civil servants to serve under it, but very few were willing to stay even when Bot offered them a double salary and tax exemptions.⁶⁶ This refusal meant that Indonesian officials rather than Papuans were brought in. Seeing that the transfer was imminent the Dutch military had little interest in getting involved in clashes with Indonesian infiltrators, whose presence was now legalised, and in confrontations between disgruntled Papuans and Indonesian forces now pouring in. Getting out was their first concern. The UN facilitated this as American and Canadian planes dropped food and medicine for Indonesian infiltrators still in the jungle, together with the information that an agreement had

⁶³ Elands et al. 2006, pp 74-77.

⁶⁴ Hoffenaar and Schoenmaker 1994, pp 216-221.

⁶⁵ Saltford 2005, pp 61-63. On the Soviet involvement see Ooms 2012.

⁶⁶ Utrechts Nieuwsblad 1962.

been reached. UNTEA also organised an international 'law and order security force' that served to supervise public order and continue the build-up of a local force. Fifteen hundred Pakistani peacekeepers and some 1,700 Indonesian former infiltrators acted as a back-up.⁶⁷

After the agreement was signed, the Dutch government primarily focused on the evacuation of its nationals. Women and children were evacuated first. From October the men and the military followed in a rather orderly fashion. But this was a minor consolation since it was clear from the start that it was Jakarta, not UNTEA, that was in charge. Indonesian personnel took orders from Jakarta only. After the transfer, Jakarta without delay disbanded the Papua Volunteer Guard, banned the Papua flag and anthem and denied access to the island to the UN. The international community was well aware of these violations of the August 1962 Agreement but no one was willing to act upon this.

In the end, the New Guinea affair brought home the message that the age of Dutch unilateral political and military adventures was over. Not long after the transfer, it was decided to sell the aircraft carrier and the Dutch army decided to concentrate on the joint defences of Western Europe. In the 1970s the government decided to grant independence to Surinam, even when a majority of the local population wanted to remain Dutch.⁶⁸

2.4.3 *Concluding Remarks*

So, did the Dutch have an exit strategy? The answer is both yes and no. The Dutch *did* develop plans and worked hard to reach their desired end state of an independent New Guinea that they could have achieved under more favourable circumstances. At the same time, the Dutch consistently misread the signs of the times. They hoped to turn a decolonisation issue into a Cold War issue, but failed to understand that if they succeeded, their opponent would look to Moscow, which would limit their own freedom of action. They also hoped to create a viable Papuan entity, but ironically their success in doing so cast doubt on their motives and objectives, and in fact, the announcement in 1960, that the Papuans were to be able to decide on independence by 1970 only intensified Indonesian pressure since Jakarta needed to achieve its goals before that date. The Dutch military presence did little to deter but was interpreted internationally as an act of aggression and of ill will. And when The Hague tried to truly internationalise the issue, it found that this meant it would not be able to dictate the

⁶⁷ Rollings 2010, p 57.

⁶⁸ To be sure, independence was supported by a majority in the Surinam parliament.

course of affairs. In the end, the only option was a hasty withdrawal. Rarely had utter defeat looked so orderly.

2.5 VIETNAM: AN EXIT WITH A LONG SHADOW

On 1 December 2009 President Barack Obama held a speech at West Point Military Academy. He announced that the United States would send another 30,000 men to Afghanistan. This ‘surge’ was to create a viable, democratic Afghan state that would make an American withdrawal possible within a short number of years.⁶⁹ The President announced that withdrawal in June 2011.⁷⁰ Explicitly and implicitly the Vietnam legacy was present in both speeches. Thinking about foreign interventions in terms of securing congressional support, defining strategic goals, end state and exit strategy are all reminiscences of the dramatic exit from Vietnam in the early 1970s, which for many showed how the US betrayed the people of South Vietnam it had promised to protect.⁷¹ Not only politically, also militarily the period left its marks until the present. General David Petraeus, who as a 1974 West Point graduate was too young to have served in Vietnam himself, wrote in his PhD: “The legacy of Vietnam is unlikely to soon recede as an important influence on America’s senior military. The frustrations of Vietnam are too deeply etched in the minds of those who now lead the services and the combatant commanders”.⁷² The underlying issue is to what extent the US Army was responsible for the dramatic ‘loss’ of South Vietnam. Or was it the American people, the Nixon Administration or congress that betrayed the army? Every foreign intervention the US undertook since Vietnam up to the present has brought these questions to the fore again.

The widespread use of terms as ‘abandonment’ and ‘betrayal’ demonstrates that the historical debate is closely related to political points of view. It makes ‘objectivity’ in this case particularly problematic. To unravel the complexity somewhat, this short analysis focuses on the three elements that in 1969–1973 dominated American policy regarding the exit from Vietnam. First the home front: like Dwight D. Eisenhower, who had won his election

⁶⁹ See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>. Accessed 27 February 2015.

⁷⁰ See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/06/22/remarks-president-way-forward-afghanistan> and http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/26/opinion/sunday/26afghan.html?_r=0. Accessed 27 February 2015. Also Noll et al., Ch. 1 in this volume.

⁷¹ Kalb 2011.

⁷² Petraeus 1987, p i.

with the promise to end the unpopular war in Korea, Richard Nixon promised the American electorate to end the costly and hopeless involvement in Vietnam. This brought him into the White House and he linked success or failure of his presidency to strengthening the US position in the world. For this he needed to focus on public opinion and the Congress.

The second element was the military situation in Vietnam itself. President Lyndon Johnson had escalated the war in 1965 by sending huge amounts of American combat troops to South Vietnam to fight both the internal communist opposition (Viet Cong) and the North Vietnamese Army present in and around South Vietnam. He wanted the Americans to defeat both opponents militarily by overwhelming firepower in conjunction with bombardments on the North, while the South Vietnamese Army had to pacify the liberated countryside. In the eyes of the public this policy failed dramatically when the January 1968 Tet Offensive brought communist troops even within the compound of the US Embassy in Saigon. An alternative military strategy was needed, one which put the burden more on the South Vietnamese themselves. That is what Nixon planned to do. At the same time he hoped to salvage the credibility of the US as a guarantee for democratic countries all over the world that sought its assistance. In a bipolar world, dominated by the Cold War, this was of extreme importance. Moreover, Nixon did not want to be the first US President to lose a war. He was very sensitive on this point.

Third was the Chinese-Soviet rift. This offered the US some room for manoeuvre in a slowly developing tri-polar world. Moreover the Soviet Union was prepared to talk about nuclear arms reduction. This offered a unique opportunity: via the communist superpowers the US could try to diminish the lavish external military and logistical support North Vietnam received that enabled this small country to defy the superpower US. From the earliest days of his presidency Nixon therefore opened secret channels to Moscow and Beijing.

2.5.1 *Leaving in Haste but from a Position of Strength*

When Nixon entered the White House in January 1969 he knew what he wanted: leaving the Vietnam quagmire as soon as possible but from a position of strength. The exit had to enhance the US position in the world, not weaken it. But this idea was not based on any solid plan; there was only haste.⁷³ The Nixon Administration had to play chess on four boards: on the level of the Cold War it had to influence China and the Soviet

⁷³ See Laird 2005.

Union, in Vietnam it had to 'de-Americanise' the war (as it was originally named) and create a viable, strong South Vietnamese state, and at home it had to show that troops actually came back and costs were reduced. But the toughest opponent were the North Vietnamese that showed no willingness at all to abandon their ultimate goal of a united, Hanoi-led communist Vietnamese state.

The first thing the Nixon Administration undertook was to implement a new military strategy in South Vietnam under the leadership of General Creighton Abrams. Abrams proclaimed the 'one war' approach, directed simultaneously at improving security and living conditions in the countryside and fighting a counterinsurgency against the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army. It was a combination of pacification and Vietnamisation. The pacification program had already started under Johnson and had yielded some results; it was now stepped up. Vietnamese villagers were trained to defend themselves and their living conditions seemed to improve.⁷⁴ But the President was fully aware that the key to the solution was a stronger South Vietnamese Army, one that would be able to defend the country when the Americans were gone. To strengthen that army, the Administration came up with Vietnamisation: the simultaneous gradual withdrawal of American troops and the massive training and arming of the rather inefficient and poorly led South Vietnamese Army.

On the one hand, Nixon had to show to the American public that the numbers of American troops in Vietnam were in fact dwindling; on the other hand, his military advisers warned that it was impossible to make the South Vietnamese Army a credible fighting force in just a short period. But only with a credible force would South Vietnam be able to survive as an independent state. General Abrams thus had to perform conflicting tasks simultaneously: making the actual war fighting a South Vietnamese responsibility and pacifying the country while reducing his own fighting force. In March 1969 Vietnamisation became the official policy. Three months later the first 25,000 combat troops were withdrawn, the first step of what Nixon considered an irreversible process.⁷⁵

These first steps were done without consulting the South Vietnamese themselves. They were only informed in July when they were told that on the one hand the US would stand by them and on the other that after a

⁷⁴ Andrade and Willbanks 2006, pp 9-23.

⁷⁵ See for an analysis of the Abrams-years Willbanks 2004 and discussion in *Journal of Cold War Studies* (2007):115-117 and *Journal of Military History* (2006):183-186; see for a military analysis Le Gro 1985 and Cao Van Vien 1985.

massive arms build-up and training effort by the American army the defence of their country would be laid in their own hands.

At first Nixon's gamble seemed to pay off: never before had so many reports indicated that large parts of the South Vietnam countryside were peaceful and safe and that the population started to trust the government in Saigon. Some officials even dared to declare the war was won! Since the Tet Offensive North Vietnamese and Viet Cong military activity had been low, time that was effectively used by the US Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) to train and pacify.⁷⁶

2.5.2 *Defeat by a 'Decent Interval'*

For Nixon Vietnamisation was an essential part of the path to a new future: the creation of a viable non-communist South Vietnam which could always count on US support. But only through negotiations with North Vietnam and détente in the Cold War could the US hope to pull out and keep the initiative from a position of strength. This quickly proved much harder than implementing a new counterinsurgency strategy. Already in the first half of 1969, Nixon secretly made overtures to North Vietnam and the Russians, but these yielded precious little results. This was not without risk: reducing US troop strength in Vietnam to please the US public and Congress without obtaining concessions from the communist side could not go on for too long. All the communists had to do was wait and see the US weaken its position in Vietnam by its own doing. The North Vietnamese knew quite well, as did most American policy-makers, that the South Vietnamese Army was still a very long way from being able to defend the country and they saw American popular resentment against the war rising. The only thing Nixon could do was to leave the timetable for Vietnamisation open-ended and to support the South Vietnamese with tons of modern equipment; making that Army over one million men in size and making it effectively participate in joint and combined operational campaign planning.

When Nixon addressed the American public in November 1969, he unveiled Vietnamisation publicly as major element of his exit strategy for the first time. But he was also worried, as the communist side had not made any move yet. He disclosed that meetings with the Soviet leadership had taken place and that peace proposals had been sent to Hanoi, but that these efforts had been unsuccessful. Still, he wanted the American people to believe the US acted from a position of strength and that South Vietnam

⁷⁶ Sorley 1999.

could survive without a US military presence on the ground. The 'silent majority' might have supported the President, but during the autumn of that year huge anti-war rallies were held all over the US.

As diplomatic overtures brought no results, the US tried to force North Vietnam to negotiate by bombing their sanctuaries and bases in Cambodia and conduct large land operations together with the South Vietnamese Army in the border area with Cambodia (March-June 1970). The results were mixed and contradictory: militarily the worst fears of how the South Vietnamese would fight did not come true. Although it was not a spectacular victory, the North Vietnamese suffered a blow that prevented them from attacking South Vietnam from Cambodia for a long time. For the home front it was a disaster: not only did protests against the war increase and support for Nixon decline, Congress also dramatically increased pressure on the President. The House passed the Cooper-Church Amendment forbidding the President to send US troops into Cambodia.

In a televised message to the American people in October 1970 Nixon again invited the North Vietnamese to negotiate. He was prepared to make concessions to break the deadlock: a ceasefire, leaving communist troops in South Vietnam in place for now, an ending of bombardments and negotiations on a 'staged withdrawal' of both American and North Vietnamese troops. Public opinion and Congress applauded the moves, the North Vietnamese did not; and they waited and continued to build up troops close to the South Vietnamese border.⁷⁷

In February-March 1971 Nixon again tried to force his way out of deadlock by using military might.⁷⁸ Now the communist bases in Laos were targeted. The role of the US forces was smaller than during the attack on Cambodia as this operation had to prove the effectiveness of the South Vietnamese Army. And it did, at least according to the US government. Although major shortcomings in leadership, command and control as well as in problems with desertion and corruption existed, Nixon publicly declared Vietnamisation a success and sped up the American troop withdrawal. At the end of the year, all ground combat would be the responsibility of South Vietnam itself. To compensate for the weaknesses even more equipment was sent to South Vietnam; communication with representatives of Hanoi was hesitantly resumed. Both actions did nothing to diminish the anti-war feeling at the home front. On the contrary, Congress became very hostile to the president and although the most extreme

⁷⁷ Kissinger 2003, p 184.

⁷⁸ Operation Lam Son 719.

proposals failed to win a majority, support for the prolonged stay in Indo-China and the military operations dwindled.

Secret talks with North Vietnam were resumed in May 1971, but as long as the US would withdraw the remaining troops *after* a ceasefire was declared, the North refused to promise it would *not* strengthen its military presence in Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam. The US concession to let communist troops remain in South Vietnam was insufficient. Also, the US refused to dismantle the present South Vietnamese government. No break-through was achieved and the North used these months to prepare its next major attack on the South.

Around Easter 1972 North Vietnam undertook an extensive three-front attack on South Vietnam. It was the ultimate test for Vietnamisation. Was the war really won as some stated and could the South Vietnamese Army stand on its own feet? The North Vietnamese attack came shortly after Nixon again reduced the number of US troops, now a mere ten percent of their numbers on the eve of the Tet Offensive. The bitter fighting of April–May 1972 again proved American support was essential against the massive communist onslaught. American fire support in ground battles and an extensive bombing campaign on logistic and infrastructural targets in North Vietnam (*Operation Linebacker*) saved the day. This show of American airpower intensified home front criticism on Nixon while Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who negotiated with North Vietnamese representatives, let the Soviets and the Chinese know that the only thing the US wanted was a withdrawal from Vietnam, separated by what he called a ‘decent interval’ with a possible resumption of North Vietnamese attacks.

Improvement of Sino-US relations and the arms limitation talks with the Soviets became a priority for all superpowers involved.⁷⁹ In fact, the tacit acceptance from 1971 onward that a collapse of South Vietnam was not only very probable but also palatable after the US Army had withdrawn without being defeated, showed that Nixon and Kissinger had given up on South Vietnam. In January 1973, Nixon would frame this as ‘peace with honour’ but in fact Vietnam had become a sideshow from the moment the Administration seriously negotiated with the Chinese and the Soviets. All kinds of promises for future support had been made to the South Vietnamese, but they were kept in the dark about the secret negotiations with both the Soviet Union and North Vietnam.

⁷⁹ Hanhimäki 2004, pp 48–53 and 186–187 and 383; see also Kimball 2004 and Berman 2001.

In the summer of 1972, some months after the Brezhnev-Nixon summit in Moscow, some progress was made as the North dropped its precondition that the South Vietnamese president had to resign and the US accepted that the North Vietnamese troops actually present in the South could remain there. A coalition government would take over, the US army would leave and elections had to decide on the future government.⁸⁰ The South Vietnamese government was shocked by this American 'sell out' or 'humiliating surrender' they were forced to accept. Strong American pressure on the South Vietnamese to comply followed. In return Nixon solemnly promised that the US would always stand by its ally. But this US pressure backfired. North Vietnam suspended the negotiations because the US seemed willing to accommodate the South.

Nixon, after a landslide victory for his second term in November 1972, desperately wanted to finish the Vietnam Era and publicly blamed the North Vietnamese for delaying an agreement. In December the Linebacker bombing campaign resumed while he simultaneously pressed the government in Saigon to accept a ceasefire that left 170,000 North Vietnamese troops in the South and gave the North a veto in the ceasefire commission. All promises for continued support as compensation for the South were in fact hollow: Congress would never approve them and they were no longer in Nixon's interest as the Cold War had changed fundamentally. Additionally, his position was weakened by the Watergate scandal. In January 1973 peace was signed between North Vietnam and the US. Within days the North Vietnamese began to 'land grab' in order to strengthen their hold on the South. Congress approved the Case-Church Amendment in June, forbidding US military support for Vietnam. Two years later South Vietnam was history. The 'decent interval' had become reality.

2.5.3 *Concluding Remarks*

From Tet onwards, and during Vietnamisation, it had become increasingly obvious that military victory was impossible. Dwindling domestic support limited the president's room for manoeuvre while the persistent North Vietnamese stance – they were neither intimidated by US verbal and military power nor by superpower politics – further reduced the US options. These factors, combined with major international strategic shifts that changed US foreign policy priorities, all led to the acceptance by the American leadership of a 'decent interval': the North could continue the war if they liked but only after the US had left. By 1971-1972 this way of

⁸⁰ Kissinger 2003, pp 293-295 and 318; Willbanks 2004, p 166.

thinking led to the tacit abandonment of any solution that preserved a South Vietnamese state. This sobering outcome was traumatic and eventful and cast long shadows that are still very relevant today.⁸¹ It is no wonder that President Obama, like others before him, reiterated that “this is not Vietnam”, even when the resemblance is striking.

2.6 EXIT STRATEGIES: A LONG AND WINDING ROAD

Exit strategies reveal a fundamental paradox. They aim at an orderly withdrawal of the committed forces while at the same time seeking to continue some modified presence. Exit strategies therefore handle the problem of leaving in order to stay, albeit in a different guise. By developing an exit strategy a leaving party tries to impose its terms and conditions for departure on its armed opponent. Obviously, if there was no continued influence at stake there would be no need for an exit strategy whatsoever. In that case one would opt for a straight and immediate extraction of one's forces irrespective of the consequences. Conversely, if a continued influence failed to be contested, a peace settlement would be arrived at in perfect harmony.

The Dutch, British and American experiences discussed above, show that the road to a viable exit strategy may prove to be long and winding if not outright frustrating. The gradual decolonisation the Dutch government tried to impose on the Indonesian Republic turned sour, due to a stalemate on the battlefield combined with a political fiasco at the conference table. The Dutch intention to transform the former colony into a federal state, closely connected with the Netherlands in a Commonwealth, came to naught, as the Republican political leadership wanted nothing less than a fully independent and unified state. As a concession to The Hague, western New Guinea was not transferred to Jakarta in 1949, but when President Sukarno in 1961-1962 threatened to invade the island the Dutch policy of Papuan self-determination failed to materialise. The Dutch acquiesced in a transfer of authority to the United Nations, soon followed by the incorporation of the former colony in Indonesia. Just as in 1949, The Hague failed to leave on its own terms and conditions after which the Dutch government had to content itself with a face-saving solution brokered not in The Hague but in New York and Washington. The Nixon Administration tried to leave the Vietnam quagmire from a position of strength and opted for pacification of South Vietnam and Vietnamisation of the war effort while making overtures to Hanoi, Moscow and Beijing. The president

⁸¹ <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=41755>. Accessed 27 February 2015.

underpinned his policy by the Linebacker bombing campaign, oscillating with his fortunes or misfortunes at the political level. However, the net result was a sell-out of American as well as South Vietnamese interests that foreboded a disastrous transition to a Vietnamised war. The British in Malaya have the best record. Through a mixture of force and consent they left their former colony as a pacified non-communist and independent state within the British Commonwealth and maintained a military presence.

In explaining the British success where others failed several points can be made. The first is that a divided house against itself will not stand. Facing a revolutionary war of decolonisation in Indonesia the Dutch displayed internal division both within the government and within the administrative and military leadership in Batavia. As a consequence the Dutch embarked on a contradictory course of negotiations for gradual decolonisation hand in hand with the political and military annihilation of the Republic as a prerequisite for this end state. Small wonder that the Republic preferred to fight for its survival rather than give in. In the New Guinea case the Dutch government again followed a two-pronged but self-defeating strategy. Papuan self-determination was hard to reconcile with the settlement of thousands of Indo-Europeans and the intention to make West Papua a bulwark against communism. The Nixon Administration did not fare any better, caught as it was between a war-weary home front, a non-cooperative Congress and adverse conditions on the battlefield. The British successfully avoided offering such windows of opportunity to their opponent even if they made serious mistakes and took great risks in applying brute force against their armed opponent while at the same time not refraining from harsh treatment of the civil population.

The second point is that a successful exit strategy presupposes an opponent that is both ready and capable to accept the terms and conditions under which one is willing to leave. During the Emergency the British carved out a Malayan ruling elite to which they could safely transfer power without jeopardising everything they had been fighting for since 1948. The Dutch did not enjoy such blessings, neither in the 1945-1949 war nor in the confrontation in New Guinea. When dealing with moderate leaders as Sjahrir and Hatta the Dutch saw their counterparts out-manoeuvred by more radical political and military leaders in the Republic. In 1961-1962 the Dutch fared even worse, as the creation of a Papuan elite to transfer power to was an emergency expedient without much credibility. Consequently Sukarno at an early stage discovered that a winner-takes-all outcome was within grasp. Nixon's room for manoeuvre was severely hampered by

the poor quality of his South Vietnamese ally, politically weak, divided and corrupt as well as militarily incompetent as it was.

The third point is that military strength does pay off as was clearly demonstrated in Malaya. In contrast the Dutch two times failed to obtain a military edge over their opponent and two times the conditions of the exit were decided by forces beyond their control: the powerplay of the United States and the Soviet Union due to the Cold War antagonism. But military strength is not enough in itself. For all their military might, the United States had to accept an unfavourable exit from Vietnam, to say the least. Blinded by unfounded belief in its military superiority The Hague, Batavia and Washington seem to have grossly underestimated the real strength of their opponent as well as the true character of the war they were engaged in. But ultimately military strength and the question of whether one is a small power, a superpower or a great power in decline are subordinate to the points made above: unity of effort and a cooperative opponent.

The last point is concerned with time and timing. The Malayan case suggests, as one would expect from a strategic point of view, that the starting point is decisive indeed and not the desired end state. The conditions shaped in the initial phase (1948-1950) set the stage for the Briggs-Templer *hearts and minds* campaign that lent Malaya its benchmark fame. Nixon inherited a war in which the chances for an exit on his terms and conditions had already been seriously compromised by past events. In 1945 the Dutch started their war in the turmoil of an Indonesian revolution that had already gained sufficient momentum. Until the very end in 1962 their strategy never recovered from these initial setbacks. Time was on the side of the insurgents, both in Indonesia and in Vietnam. Besides, the protracted character of all conflicts under consideration here is another factor of influence: the longer wars take, the more adverse complications can be expected. The fact that the British managed to bring a fifteen-year armed conflict to an acceptable termination is another proof of their strategic ingenuity.

But at what stage can the decision to leave and its terms and conditions best be made public to the other side? The timing of this step is closely related to the question of taking, keeping or losing the strategic initiative. Announcing the exit too early can be as harmful as being too late. Still, drawing pertinent conclusions on this point is hazardous as deadlines are part of the strategic process in a comprehensive sense.

Finally, the introduction argued that if need be policy-makers should not refrain from adapting their objectives to the course of events on the battlefield. The evidence discussed above shows that in this process even

strategy itself might become a moving target, making the outcome of wars unpredictable in the first place. Such is the true nature of war, the military instrument and strategy.

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