



I.

# INTRODUCTION





# I.

## Background, guiding principles and methodology

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Between 1945 and 1949, Indonesia defended its recently declared independence, and the Netherlands waged its last major colonial war.<sup>1</sup> Much is now known about this war, but a great deal has also remained unclear or contested. At the end of 2016, the second Rutte cabinet decided to finance a broad-based study – conducted by the KITLV, the NIMH and NIOD<sup>2</sup> – on the Dutch military conduct during this conflict.<sup>3</sup> This book presents the conclusions of that study. In this chapter, the background, guiding principles and methodology of the study will be explained.

### THE WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH IN THE NETHERLANDS

On 17 August 1945, Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta proclaimed the Republic of Indonesia. Their proclamation of independence came two days after the Japanese capitulation, which had brought an end to the Second World War and paved the way for the departure of the Japanese occupation forces from Indonesia. The Japanese occupation, which had lasted three and a half years, had effectively brought an end to the Dutch East Indies in 1942. The Dutch government refused to accept Sukarno and Hatta's proclamation of

independence and initially sought to recolonize the archipelago – that is, to restore its colonial authority. From 1946, Dutch policy was geared towards a process of decolonization under the auspices of the Dutch government. This was made conditional upon a restoration of ‘calm and order’ – or, as a later wording put it, ‘order and peace’ – that had to be enforced by military means. It was for this reason that this process – which from the Dutch perspective was concluded on 27 December 1949 with the transfer of sovereignty – was characterized by not only protracted negotiations, but also bitter warfare. The war took a very unequal toll, as demonstrated by the fatalities documented by the Dutch armed forces: approximately 5,300 deaths on the Dutch side, of which half were the result of accidents or disease, compared to possibly 100,000 soldiers and civilians killed on the Indonesian side as a result of Dutch violence.<sup>4</sup>

The Dutch authorities justified the war as necessary for restoring calm and order. Hidden behind this justification were economic and geopolitical interests as well as a colonial sense of obligation to help the colony in its development. More specifically, the Republic was portrayed as nothing more than a Japanese fabrication, while the restoration of order was allegedly focused primarily on protecting the European population – and other groups affiliated with the colonial regime – from the revolutionary violence. By contrast, the Indonesian nationalists saw the return of the Dutch military and colonial administration as an act of aggression and an attempt to restore the colonial order. This remains the leading view in Indonesia, a view that comes in many variations. This period is seen by Indonesians as a Dutch attempt to ‘reoccupy’ and ‘recolonize’ the archipelago, and by the same token as the ‘defence of our independence’.

The Dutch government’s standpoint has since evolved from one of justifying its own policy to that of concluding that the Netherlands had stood ‘on the wrong side of history’ during these war years. With this statement, pronounced in 2005 by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Bot, the Dutch government ‘generously’ accepted the legitimacy of the proclamation of independence both ‘politically and morally’, reaffirming ‘earlier expressions of regret’. In his speech, Minister Bot described the entire history as ‘extremely bitter for everyone involved: for the Indo-Dutch community, for the Dutch soldiers, but first and foremost for the Indonesian population itself’. In doing so, he made a statement about the appropriateness – and implicitly also the legitimacy – of the Dutch decision to deploy military resources on a large scale.<sup>5</sup>

Bot was less explicit about the way in which the Dutch military had waged this war, even though he did say that ‘the separation of Indonesia from the Netherlands took longer and was accompanied by more military violence than was necessary’. In 2020 in Indonesia, King Willem-Alexander unequivocally offered excuses for the ‘excessive violence on the part of the Dutch’. He did not, however, make clear whether these excesses had been incidental or more structural in nature. The idea that these excesses were ‘merely’ incidents has been questioned for some time. Nonetheless, the government stance formulated in 1969 by Prime Minister Piet de Jong – which states that while regrettable ‘excesses’ did occur, ‘the armed forces as a whole acted correctly in Indonesia’ – to this day remains unrevised.<sup>6</sup>

The De Jong cabinet made this assessment on the basis of the ‘Memorandum on excesses’ (*Excessennota*), a government-commissioned survey of cases of excessive violence documented in the available archives — a survey that was not considered complete even by the government researchers who had worked on it. The memorandum had been written in much haste in reaction to revelations by war veteran Joop Hueting about crimes committed by Dutch soldiers – revelations that had caused considerable public and political commotion. Although new disclosures have since been made on a fairly regular basis and renewed publicity has been given to well-known cases, successive governments have never reconsidered this 1969 stance. Neither did these revelations lead to the prosecution of perpetrators of individual or collective acts of violence generally referred to as ‘excesses’ and ‘excessive violence’. Indeed, in 1971 the government even deliberately pressed for a statute of limitations for war crimes committed by its own armed forces in Indonesia.<sup>7</sup> It was not until 2011 that a start was made on offering the victims serious reparations.

In the decades following 1969, the debate in the Netherlands was cursory, with short episodes of publicity in between long periods in which there was little public interest in the matter. One such episode of public attention occurred when the Dutch East Indies sections of Loe de Jong’s scholarly tome *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* [The Kingdom of the Netherlands during the Second World War] was published. De Jong, who was highly critical in his assessment of Dutch political and military policy, only agreed *not* to use the term ‘war crimes’ after coming under considerable pressure from veterans of the Indonesian war and their sympathizers. In 1995, Queen Beatrix’s state visit to Indonesia generated a new wave

of discussions. The visit prompted much publicity, including a startling TV documentary about Dutch atrocities in Rawagede. Well in advance of the state visit, Lower House Speaker Wim Deetman had called for a debate on the Dutch military action during the war against the Republic of Indonesia. His call fell on deaf ears, however, and once again there was silence. This silence was maintained until the second Balkenende cabinet made the aforementioned statements— through the mouthpiece of Bot — on the eve of the sixtieth anniversary of the 17th of August, Indonesia's proclamation of independence.

The public silence was once again broken in 2011 when a ground-breaking court ruling was issued in response to civil claims over the massacre in Rawagede. The claims were submitted by Liesbeth Zegveld, a lawyer, on behalf of the Committee of Dutch Debts of Honour (*Stichting Comité Nederlandse Ereschulden*, which goes by the Indonesian acronym KUKB) chaired by Jeffry Pondaag. Although the State had initially invoked the statute of limitations, the district court of The Hague ruled in favour of the claimants, eight surviving relatives. The State subsequently decided to settle with the plaintiffs. The position taken by the State marked a break from the line it had previously taken, which essentially involved turning a blind eye or, when this was no longer possible, delaying or categorically denying the claims. In its response to the court's verdict, the government openly apologized for several specific cases of extreme violence. From 2013, the State again paid reparations to Indonesian widows. These new claims — several dozen — dealt with the massacre perpetrated by the commandos under Captain Raymond Westerling in South Sulawesi with the support of other soldiers of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger, KNIL) in late 1946 and early 1947. The State established a scheme to deal with similar cases of 'summary executions'. These court cases ran into some snags, however, mostly due to the difficulty of the burden of proof laid upon the claimants so long after the event. Nonetheless, the State was no longer contesting the principle of liability for the crimes committed by Dutch soldiers between 1945 and 1949 in Indonesia. In 2015, the court ruled that this liability could be extended to the cases of the children of unlawfully executed Indonesian men. This ruling was not without consequences: since then, a civil-law arrangement for these children has also come into force. In addition, the KUKB has expanded its lawsuits — with some success — to cover other forms of extreme violence such as torture and rape.

These lawsuits have received much publicity. Moreover, the Dutch media have come forward with new revelations as well as more reporting on familiar cases. Journalists and documentary makers have played an important role in setting the agenda, which in turn has helped to prepare the ground within society for a broader study of this period in Dutch history. The academic world also began to contribute to the public debate on extreme violence in the war against the Republic; barring a few exceptions, this occurred remarkably late, as historian Stef Scagliola has noted.<sup>8</sup> In the research and in the public debates, the emphasis has increasingly come to lie on questions regarding the nature and the frequency of — as well as the explanations for — actions that had previously been identified as ‘excesses’. More generally, the issue was raised of how to characterize a period that had long been referred to in the Netherlands as a period of ‘police actions’, but which was increasingly coming to be called a ‘war’.

It was in this context that the KITLV, the NIMH and NIOD made their plea in mid-2012 for a study of the Dutch military action. The first Rutte cabinet refused to finance this study, a decision that the second Rutte cabinet initially upheld, reminding the institutes that they were free to conduct the study using their own resources. At the end of 2016, the government nevertheless indicated that it was willing to finance this research after all, referring to the recently published study *De brandende kampongs van generaal Spoor* [The Burning Kampongs of General Spoor] and its author Rémy Limpach’s harsh conclusions about the Dutch use of extreme violence.<sup>9</sup> In September 2017, the four-year research programme *Independence, Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia, 1945-1950* was launched, the main findings and conclusions of which are presented in this book. A series of books on the topics examined under this programme is being published at the same time.

## FROM THE PLEA IN 2012 TO THE RESEARCH DESIGN IN 2017

On 19 June 2012, the directors of the KITLV, the NIMH and NIOD wrote a plea published in the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* advocating a study of the Dutch military violence in Indonesia.<sup>10</sup> They argued that the study was necessary given the controversies and emotions evoked by the memories and interpretations of the violence of war – making the case for ‘the will to know’ (facts, insights, explanations) – and steered clear of making moral judgments within the ongoing debates. They maintained that a scholarly

analysis would lead to a better understanding of collective and individual conduct. At the same time, the institutes took pains not to create the illusion that such a comprehensive research project, to be conducted together with Indonesian historians, would offer the last word on the matter: 'This is, after all, historiography.'

While the plea was taken up by the media and the academic world, it gave rise to mixed reactions among Dutch politicians and was thereupon rejected by the government, as mentioned earlier. The three institutes nonetheless turned their plea into an initial research proposal that was sent to the relevant members of government, the chairpersons of the upper and lower houses of parliament and all the political parties represented in parliament.<sup>11</sup> Much of the contents of this first research proposal eventually found its way into the research design for which the second Rutte cabinet awarded funding at the beginning of 2017.<sup>12</sup>

The 2012 proposal contained four sub-projects, the largest of which was described as an 'empirical study to establish and analyse the use of force by Dutch troops in the years 1945 to 1950, understood in the broader context of the Indonesian Revolution from the proclamation and *bersiap* to the transfer of sovereignty and the dissolution of the KNIL'. A second project was to investigate 'whether and how violence subsequently led to investigations by the military, judicial and/or official bodies to establish facts and to interpret events', while a third project was to offer an explanation for the violence at the micro-level and in 'the broader context of the use of force in post-war decolonization processes in Asia'. A final project would address 'the public response to the Dutch military conduct in the period 1945-1950, both in the Netherlands and in Indonesia'. If we compare this first proposal with the research design approved by the government in February 2017 for which funding was obtained, it is clear that while the later design is more elaborate and has a broader scope, the central questions are essentially the same.

After the rejection of funding by the Rutte cabinet in 2012, the three institutes each continued with the research independently while also forming an informal lobby in The Hague. Then, in the first half of 2016, the political tide turned. It was in this context that the three institutes decided to revise and elaborate the 2012 research proposal. This led to an extensive research proposal that was shared with a consultation group of various government ministries. In the meantime, Foreign Minister Affairs Bert Koenders indicated that he wanted to revisit the initial rejection of the 2012 request. The

government's reaction to this new research proposal was positive. There were requests to clarify some points, which led to an expansion of the passages about the 'bersiap period' and the collaboration with Indonesian scientists, but the content was not changed in any substantial way.

In the ensuing months, the research proposal was further developed. The proposed collaboration with Indonesian colleagues took shape in a separate project called *Regional Studies*. At the request of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (vws), an extra project called *Witnesses & Contemporaries* was added in order to give those directly involved a voice with respect to the topic of the study. The arrangement between the government and the three institutes is explicitly not a commission but rather a co-financing arrangement.<sup>13</sup> This means that, in accordance with the principles for independent research specified by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, KNAW), the public funding body neither interferes with the content nor is responsible for the execution and results of the research, while the researchers are bound only by procedural and financial accountability to the grant provider. Throughout the research project, this relationship was never called into question.

While gradual additions were thus made to the final research design, one element of the original research design was relegated to the background: the pursuit of 'an explanation of the violence at the micro-level', which at the time was thought to require a behavioural science approach, also with a view to ongoing and future military missions.<sup>14</sup> Although this element of drawing lessons for the future remains relevant, we lacked the capacity and the expertise to explore this specific theme.

As mentioned above, this study aims to provide a descriptive analysis and explanation of Dutch military conduct in Indonesia, with considerable attention given to the historical, political and international context as well as to the aftermath of the war. More specifically, we consider the question whether the extreme violence of the Dutch armed forces was structural in nature and if so, why this occurred, who was responsible, and the extent to which people were held accountable for this violence at the time and later.

This line of questioning builds on previous research. In the years before 2012, and certainly in the ensuing years, an increasing number of studies were published – written, among others, by historians associated with the three institutes – that questioned the earlier views and especially the government position of 1969 regarding the incidental character of the 'exces-

sive force' used by the Dutch military on the basis of new research into the source material. Based on this historiography, a research plan was designed that included a series of studies aiming to explore key issues and address some important gaps in the existing knowledge:

- *Bersiap*: researched within the broader context of the dynamics of violence in the early days of the Indonesian Revolution.
- *Political-administrative context*: focused in particular on the question of how politics and government administration in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies/Indonesia dealt with information about the high level of violence during the war.
- *International political context*: what role did other countries play with respect to Dutch diplomatic and military policies and how did this affect the dynamics of the war?
- *Comparative research on decolonization wars*, with the aim of identifying similarities and unique characteristics.
- *Asymmetric warfare*: focused on the Dutch armed forces and the dynamics between these armed forces and the Indonesian army and other combat groups; divided into three sub-investigations: the Dutch intelligence and security services in the field; 'technical violence' (artillery and air forces); and military justice.
- *Regional studies*: a joint Indonesian-Dutch study of the context of the dynamics of violence in a number of selected Indonesian regions.
- *Societal aftermath*: the public and political processing of the war in the Netherlands to date.
- *Witnesses & Contemporaries*: This part of the research programme fulfils a different, more societal role. It is primarily designed to collect testimonies and egodocuments and thus to give more 'colour' and layering to the experiences and memories of those involved both then and now.

This book summarizes the most important results of the research. Part I outlines in three chapters and an interim conclusion the context in which the rest of the book can be understood; it is based on the historiography and therefore is a collation of mostly existing knowledge and insights. This is followed by an intermezzo that is based on the *Witnesses & Contemporaries* project, in which multiple perspectives are highlighted. In the second part, the results of the research programme are presented per project. In the final conclusion, the findings of the entire programme are brought together and

the main question is answered. The book concludes with an epilogue by the Indonesian historian Hilmar Farid.

## ORGANIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

The research programme began on 1 September 2017. In the Netherlands, the research team consisted of researchers from the three institutes as well as a number of employees hired specifically for this programme.<sup>15</sup> For the *Comparative Research* project, carried out in collaboration with the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS-KNAW), six researchers (mostly foreign) were hired for a short period of time. The projects were divided among the institutes on the basis of their expertise. The entire research team came together regularly in a Programme Council. The three directors of the institutes were in charge of the research programme, supported by a coordinator. NIOD acted as the lead institute, and the director of NIOD was the chairman of the Programme Council.<sup>16</sup>

The Scientific Advisory Board and the Social Resonance Group ('Maatschappelijke Klankbordgroep') were regularly consulted. The committee scientifically assessed the research plan and results, providing particularly valuable comments on two draft versions of this final work.<sup>17</sup> And we had intensive discussions with the Social Resonance Group about the expectations surrounding our research and the possible impact it would have on the groups most involved in this topic, such as the veterans of the Indonesian war and the Indo-Dutch and Moluccan communities. The public was periodically informed about the research design and about developments within the research through public forums – before the COVID crisis, that is – as well as via the programme website and a newsletter.

The plea in *de Volkskrant* in June 2012 stemmed from a conviction shared by the three institutes that thorough research was necessary to give Dutch society more clarity about the nature of the war, about extreme Dutch violence and about the actions of those involved, both during and after the war. Implicitly, the directors of the institutes were referring to a strongly felt need for a re-evaluation of the government position of 1969, but also more broadly for more critical reflection about the colonial past. Since then, this debate has not ceased. Our research programme made a modest contribution to that debate, but also became the object of it.

In 2012, bringing together these three institutes seemed the most suitable and promising way to spur the government into action. The KITLV

has a long tradition of conducting research on the Dutch East Indies and Indonesia, and NIOD of researching wars and mass violence in general but also specifically in Indonesia. Both institutes are part of the KNAW. The NIMH has a long track record of covering Dutch military history, including warfare in the colonies. The institute falls under the Ministry of Defence but operates under guarantees of scientific independence. The idea in 2012 was that this combination of three scientific institutes would carry sufficient weight in the societal debate and ultimately also among Dutch politicians.

But once the government decided to fund the research, the institutes faced criticism from several quarters. Part of that criticism entailed such questions as ‘Why is this only now being done?’. In a way, this criticism is justified. It is true that these institutes were also party to what is sometimes referred to as the tradition of remaining silent. This theme will be discussed in more detail elsewhere in this book.

The scientific independence, integrity and expertise of the three institutes and the research group have also been called into question. Generally speaking, it is difficult to respond to such accusations in a way that would satisfy everyone. We would merely point out that we work under the rules of scientific integrity as formulated by the KNAW. That is why it was contractually stipulated – and put into practice – that the government, as the funder, would have no influence on the content. As far as the expertise of the research team is concerned, we expect our publications to dispel those doubts. Regarding the composition of the team, it has been noted that the proportion of Indonesian researchers was small. While this is true, it does make sense given that the programme mainly asked questions about the Dutch role in the war.

A recurring reproach, made in particular by the KUKB, concerns the position of the NIMH.<sup>18</sup> The claim that this institute, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Defence, is by definition unable to write critically about colonial warfare can easily be refuted: the NIMH, after all, was at the forefront of critical studies on the 1945-1949 war, even before 2017.<sup>19</sup> Another objection is that the NIMH is playing incompatible roles by cooperating both in this research and in the investigation assessing the plausibility of claims by Indonesian victims of Dutch violence and their relatives. According to this accusation, the NIMH purports in its first role to contribute to impartial scientific research, while in its second role it ‘helps’ the government to refute the claims of the victims. This is simply not the case. The NIMH is

carrying out the historical verification investigation at the request of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, based on its military-historical expertise. That investigation is conducted independently and in accordance with scientific standards. The researchers consult the relevant archives and literature available in the Netherlands and report on what can be found in those sources about the specific events mentioned in the claims and what other relevant background information those sources contain – nothing more than that. The findings are meant to inform all the parties involved as well as the court, which ultimately issues a ruling on the claims. Some of the submitted claims have in fact been granted partly on the basis of the results of this investigation.

The KITLV, the NIMH and NIOD are *Dutch* institutes. Although Indonesian and Dutch scholars have for decades been cooperating regularly and with often fruitful results, there has been no strong shared tradition of researching the history of the Indonesian Revolution and the war years of 1945 to 1949. After the fall of President Suharto in 1998, the scope for such cooperation grew, helped by the fact that researchers from both countries began meeting each other in wider international networks. This increased cooperation was evident in the NIOD programme *From the Indies to Indonesia* (2002-2008), in the KITLV's intensive contact with a large number of Indonesian academic institutions, and also in the successful collaboration between Indonesian and Dutch heritage institutions. On the basis of these experiences, therefore, the plea in *de Volkskrant* and the first research proposal from 2012 already included optimistic words about the importance of – and opportunities for – intensive bilateral cooperation.

The research design produced by the KITLV, the NIMH and NIOD envisaged the use of 'mirrored research' in which historians from both countries would study the same regions and episodes of the war from their own perspectives and on the basis of an exchange of sources in order to conduct a comparative analysis of the results. This was to be done in particular for the 'Bersiap' and 'Regional Studies' projects, and it was expected to lead to the 'co-creation' of new insights in which the usually separate national historiographies would come together.

However, discussions with the envisaged Indonesian parties about the effect of such an approach quickly led to a different direction being taken. The Indonesian researchers indicated that they wanted to pursue their own priorities and did not want to be guided solely by questions arising from the

Dutch perspective. Their questions were not primarily focused on Dutch violence itself but on various dimensions of the Indonesian Revolution, in particular its social impact. This research proved to be invaluable for a better understanding of the Indonesian experience of the Dutch military conduct. The Dutch researchers understood and appreciated their Indonesian colleagues' wish to pursue different paths. The collaboration thus led not only to a better understanding of the diversity of perspectives and priorities but also to a broadening of the content of the study, although the focus remained on the Dutch war violence.

One complicating factor was that reports in the Indonesian press and social media – fuelled in part by critics in the Netherlands – began to cast the research programme in an unfavourable light by depicting it as an attempt by the Dutch to cleanse their record. This led to opposition to the project within political and military circles.<sup>20</sup> It is possible that this was one of the reasons the Indonesian archives have remained largely closed to Dutch researchers. The wary attitude of the Indonesian authorities did not come as a complete surprise to us. In the run-up to the start of this study, and until shortly before the Rutte cabinet decided to finance the research, Indonesian diplomats had made clear to both the Dutch government and the three institutes that they had serious reservations in view of the possible strains the research could put on bilateral relations. Be that as it may, as a result of these limitations and the other priorities of our Indonesian colleagues, we have not conducted the research in the way we had planned. We have uncovered fewer sources on the dynamics of violence than originally envisaged, leaving questions unanswered – questions about Indonesian perceptions of Dutch war violence and their impact on Indonesians, as well as the dynamics of violence on the Indonesian side.

Another development played a role in all of this: the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This ongoing crisis not only meant that the archives in the Netherlands and Indonesia were closed for shorter or longer periods, bringing additional delays, but also that travel became virtually impossible. Visits to Indonesian archives, interviews, workshops and field research became practically impossible from March 2020. Thus, it was often a matter of seeking ways around problems, calling on local assistance and relying on digital consultation.

All this did not prevent the very diverse (in more ways than one) Indonesian and Dutch research groups from maintaining an intensive and cordial collaboration, as evidenced by the joint workshops and discussions and,

of course, the joint publications. The leading partner in Indonesia was the history programme at the Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta, and the research leader was Bambang Purwanto. The UGM subsequently involved historians from a number of other Indonesian universities in the research. The collaboration between Indonesian and Dutch researchers took shape mainly in the *Regional Studies* and *Witnesses & Contemporaries* projects, but there was also contact with researchers from other projects and various joint discussions about perspectives and terminology. The Indonesian-Dutch collaboration has led to joint English-language publications, but also publications released exclusively in Indonesian.

### THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE STUDY

Scientific research benefits from the greatest possible transparency and freedom, starting with the design of the research and the formulation of the leading questions. For this reason, considerable attention is paid, both in this introduction and on the programme website, to the history of how this study came about. What is of crucial importance here is that the content has always been under the control of the institutes and their scientific independence has been sufficiently guaranteed. The researchers wanted to be able to understand history untethered by the government's standpoint or other views within society. This is by no means to say that each individual researcher as well as the researchers as a group are completely free of blind spots and preconceptions.

Historical research does not take place in a social and political vacuum. Especially when a theme is perceived by society as being fraught, the writing of history requires critical reflection on the guiding principles and working methods of the researchers.<sup>21</sup> Historians rarely promise to write 'the last word' or 'the truth' on a particular issue. This is not only due to the limited nature of available sources; it is because they realize that, over time, new interpretations of the past are constantly being developed – 'each generation writes its own history' – but also that these interpretations partly depend on the backgrounds and often very different perspectives of those who look at a certain facet of history, whether they are professional historians or not. In this sense, too, history is, in Pieter Geyl's famous words, a 'discussion without end'. None of which is to say that anything goes. The historian strives to create plausible interpretations of historical events – as open-mindedly as possible and on the basis of sound empirical research and a careful consideration of the arguments. Multiperspectivity and mul-

tiple voices are indispensable tools in this respect, because differences of opinion can shed light on clashing interests and on the conduct of historical figures.<sup>22</sup>

To underline the importance of this, this book contains two contributions that challenge the reader to think about the diversity of perspectives. We asked Hilmar Farid, a respected Indonesian historian who had no involvement whatsoever with the programme, to reflect in an Epilogue on this primarily Dutch research and the resulting book. And the chapter that emerged from the *Witnesses & Contemporaries* project gives the reader a compelling picture of the diversity of perspectives.

As said earlier, recognition of this complexity does not absolve us of the duty to strive for objectivity by way of method. Historical research should be based on knowledge of the historiography and the careful use of sources, including in our case in-depth reflection on the limitations of – and ‘gaps’ in – the colonial source material. Such research should rest on a balanced processing of this source material, but it should also make explicit the historians’ own presuppositions and reasoning and do justice to all findings, even if new information conflicts with the researchers’ own assumptions and arguments. This also requires transparency with regard to the use of terminology, because interpretations are often already implied in the decision to use certain terms.

In recent years, a number of veterans of the Indonesian war and the very diverse Indo-Dutch community have criticized the alleged one-sidedness of this study, which they claim is manifested in an emphasis on a priori assumptions made about structurally excessive violence on the Dutch side as well the overlooking or condoning of Indonesian violence, in particular during the ‘bersiap period’. Conversely, there have been reproaches from other groups within society that too little attention has been paid to the inherently reprehensible and structurally violent nature of Dutch colonialism over the centuries, meaning that the study assumes a legitimizing tone rather than a critical one while also offering the Dutch government an excuse to withhold reparations to Indonesian victims. And finally, there was criticism about the ambitions and the reality of the Dutch-Indonesian collaboration within the study.

This criticism has been discussed both within the research group itself and with the Scientific Advisory Board, the Social Resonance Group, and a diverse group of external critics. This led to a deepening, clarification or reformulation of the study’s guiding principles in a number of areas. It turned

out that there were also differences of opinion within the research group itself. This is not surprising given the size and diversity of the team of researchers: about 25 in the Netherlands affiliated with three institutes with different traditions, another twelve in Indonesia spread over the archipelago, the six researchers from the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS), and finally at least a dozen temporary assistants. In short, it is inherent to such a large scientific study that different perspectives and priorities emerge. These differences cannot simply be identified as Indonesian versus Dutch: there were also differences in approach within the Dutch team, partly fuelled by the 'postcolonial debate' about colonialism within the Netherlands and abroad. Internal discussions forced all of us involved to critically examine our own working methods; they also helped us to make space for multiple perspectives and reminded us of the need to choose concepts and words carefully.

Below we discuss the most important conceptual issues, beginning with the question of when the Republic of Indonesia became a fact and the consequences this has for the classification of the period 1945-1949 and for the legitimization of Dutch warfare. Next, we consider what terminology is most suitable for analysing the nature of the war and in particular the Dutch military conduct. Finally, we discuss how we approached the set of terms commonly used in the Netherlands at the time.

## LEGITIMIZATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE WAR

In both the historiography and the political and social debate, the Dutch return to the Indonesian archipelago after the Japanese capitulation and the legitimacy and nature of the Dutch military conduct have been judged in different ways. Indonesian historians – like many of their Dutch colleagues – reject the legality of pre-war colonialism and underline the legitimacy of Indonesians' independence from Dutch colonial rule and their struggle to defend it. They therefore qualify the actions of the Dutch from 1945 onwards as a 'reoccupation', a 'recolonization' and as 'aggression'. Nor is there room in this view for the term 'decolonization' as a description of the events of 1945-1949, because it suggests that the initiative lay with the colonizer to hand over sovereignty. As far as Indonesia is concerned, there is a broad consensus in this respect not only among historians but in the whole of Indonesian society and politics, even though different conclusions may be drawn on issues such as the

main driving forces in the process (the importance of armed struggle versus negotiations), the role of internal contradictions (regional, political, religious) and the significance of the first years of the war for the later development of the republic. This also explains the great interest in regional histories of the revolution.

On the Dutch side, there were – and still are – major differences in the interpretation of the war. These differences stem from changes in the way the Dutch look at their own colonial history in a broader sense.<sup>23</sup> During the colonial period, the legitimacy of the colonial system was only questioned by a small minority. It therefore comes as no surprise that between 1945 and 1949 the aim of restoring Dutch authority – including the deployment of military violence for that purpose – was regarded as legitimate, initially as an end in itself but gradually as a means to ensure that a decolonization process took place under Dutch auspices. It was only 60 years later, in 2005 – with Minister Bot's statement that the Netherlands had been 'on the wrong side of history' due to its large-scale deployment of military force – that the Dutch government for the first time explicitly sought to align itself with the Indonesian position regarding the legitimacy of the struggle for independence, a position that retroactively characterized the Dutch military actions as unjust. As mentioned, Bot spoke only in general terms about the way in which the Dutch armed forces had waged the war and did not go into the legitimacy of the colonialism that had preceded it.

A brief remark regarding the legitimacy of colonialism is needed here. In the immense literature on European colonialism, widely differing views about colonialism's intentions, function and effects have been defended. Historians have also paid much attention to differences between and within empires and between different periods. What is less controversial, however, is the assessment that colonialism was primarily driven by economic and geopolitical self-interest, that it was generally racist and paternalistic in nature – even in the later phase of 'ethical' policies in the Dutch East Indies – and that political repression and the exercise of violence were inherent to the colonial state. One of the guiding principles of this study is that the same holds true for Dutch colonialism in Indonesia. The Dutch colonial period, which in effect ended in 1942 with the Japanese occupation, is not the subject of this study, but this interpretation of colonialism did play an important role in our interpretation of Indonesian nationalism and the Dutch attempt after 1945 to reimpose their authority over the entire archipelago.

Colonial rule was considered legitimate by the Western states concerned as well as in the world order they dominated. Although in the interwar period and during the Second World War the relevant European states and certainly also the United States became somewhat more receptive to the resistance movements against the colonial order, and even though plans were devised for future decolonization, the premise continued to be that the colonial powers should determine the direction and pace of this process. This was no different for the Dutch position toward the Dutch East Indies, which is why Dutch politicians and large parts of the Dutch population considered a ‘restoration’ of the colonial order to be self-evident, whether or not as a ‘phase’ on the way to decolonization. What was overlooked or dismissed was that, since the 1920s, a nationalist movement had developed that had gained a massive following by 1945, despite all attempts to repress it. The underestimation and rejection of this Indonesian quest for independence proved to be a divisive issue in post-war Dutch politics – and also had the effect of hijacking the discussion about the level of violence during the war, long after 1949.

During the war and for many years afterwards, the dominant Indonesian and Dutch perspectives on this history differed significantly. This was most apparent in the discussions about dates and definitions. From the Indonesian perspective, the Dutch colonial period had already come to an end on 9 March 1942 with its capitulation to Japan, and the independent Republic of Indonesia was a *fait accompli* on 17 August 1945.<sup>24</sup> The return of the Dutch colonial administration and military was, from this point of view, an unlawful attempt to reoccupy or recolonize the archipelago, and the war was thus a conflict between two states in which the Netherlands acted as an aggressor on Indonesian territory. This perspective was accordingly made explicit in the title of our research programme by the addition of the term ‘independence’ – *Independence, Decolonization, War and Violence in Indonesia, 1945-1950* – at the suggestion of our Indonesian researchers.

Within Dutch politics, the opposite perspective was dominant: the Netherlands had not only the right but also the duty to restore ‘order and peace’ in the archipelago with the aim of reaching a new arrangement under Dutch auspices. From this perspective, 27 December 1949 was the decisive moment in the decolonization process because it was the day on which the Kingdom of the Netherlands transferred sovereignty over the entire archipelago – with the exception of West New Guinea – to the United States of Indonesia, which needed to remain tied to the Kingdom of the Netherlands through a Union.<sup>25</sup>

In recent decades, the Dutch political position has gradually shifted in the direction of the official Indonesian narrative. The categorical rejection of the *proklamasi* of 17 August has reluctantly been turned into an effective recognition – known in the jargon as a *de facto* recognition – of that date as the founding date of the Republic. The Dutch government has always argued that a formal legal – i.e., *de jure* – recognition is not possible on a retroactive basis or that it would in any case be an anachronism. By this reasoning, what the Dutch government can do is recognize that the proclamation and thus the ambitions of 17 August *should* have been recognized, but it cannot undo the fact that this did not happen at the time.

In summary, the Indonesian and Dutch views on the legitimacy of the war were diametrically opposed to each other. The choice to designate 17 August 1945 or 27 December 1949 as the day that Indonesia became independent was at the time, therefore, one that was heavily politically charged, with immediate repercussions for the characterization of the war. In the case of 17 August 1945, a war took place on Indonesian territory between two sovereign states whereby the Netherlands was the aggressor. In the case of 27 December 1949, one could describe the conflict as police actions against an armed rebellion or as a traditional colonial war such as had frequently been waged in the past in the Dutch East Indies, but this time on a larger scale and with a different outcome. As historians, we do not make a choice between the two views. What is relevant for us is the knowledge that 17 August 1945 was the starting shot for two partly opposing processes of state formation in the archipelago, with the Republic seeking to construct an independent unitary state and the Dutch and Dutch East Indies governments pursuing a federal state with strong ties to the Netherlands – all of which resulted in a bloody war.

The *de facto* Dutch recognition of 17 August 1945 implied a break with the framing of the war in terms of ‘police actions’ undertaken in its own colonial territory. This point of view invoked an international legal order that at the time was still mainly dominated by the Western – generally colonial – countries. At the same time, the Dutch view was already contested during the war, not only by the Republic but also by other countries, including some in the Security Council of the United Nations. Nonetheless, the vast majority of states did not recognize Indonesia until after 27 December 1949, while its accession to the United Nations came only on 28 September 1950.

Indonesians usually refer to this period in history simply as the *Revolusi Nasional*, which implies a struggle against the Netherlands in defence of the independence already achieved on 17 August 1945. The two so called ‘police actions’ are consequently referred to as *Agresi Militer Belanda 1* and *Agresi Militer Belanda 2*. In the recent Dutch historiography, the misleading term ‘police actions’ to designate the years 1945-1949 has been replaced by the term ‘war’, used in compound phrases such as ‘war of independence’, ‘decolonization war’, ‘colonial war’ as well as ‘Indonesian war’ and ‘Dutch-Indonesian war’. There is something to be said for all these terms. When one speaks of a ‘decolonization war’, the emphasis is more on the struggle as part of a process that also includes the political negotiations concluded at the end of 1949, or one is referring to international debates where the term is commonly used. In choosing to use the term ‘war of independence’ – also referred to in Indonesian as ‘freedom war’ in addition to ‘national revolution’ – the emphasis is placed more on ‘1945’ and the Indonesian war of defence against the Dutch ‘recolonization’ in the ensuing years. There are good arguments for both choices, and they do not necessarily contradict each other. Our preference for the term ‘war of independence’ does justice to the Indonesian perspective and is in line with the broader use of this term for similar historical events – for example, in relation to both the American and the Dutch wars of independence.

## ANALYTICAL TERMS AND (COLONIAL) LANGUAGE

In terms of the nature of the Dutch military conduct, the government’s position from 1969 officially still stands, namely that the armed forces as a rule behaved ‘correctly’ and that although there were regrettable ‘excesses’ – incidents, in other words – there was ‘no question of systematic cruelty’. On the basis of research that has since been carried out into the nature and extent of the Dutch violence, this position is rarely endorsed by historians anymore. More and more evidence has been documented that the extreme Dutch violence was widespread and was of a structural and/or systematic nature. That the Dutch government now sees cause to reconsider this, too, is evident from its decision to fund this research project and from its explanation for that decision, which alluded to the firm conclusions reached by Limpach about the extreme violence perpetrated by the Dutch.

The current debate therefore focuses mainly on the question of whether this violence should be labelled as structural and/or systematic – instead of

incidental – and why it happened. We agree with the way in which these terms are used in the historiography in the sense that the difference between structural and systematic is not a question of quantity or frequency but rather a question of intention. The systematic deployment of extreme violence occurs intentionally – that is, by order or with the approval of the senior military and political leadership – while the structural use of extreme violence involves (tacit) tolerance or indifference. In Chapter 3, we consider this historiography in further detail. In the interim conclusions included at the end of Part I, we recap how we define a number of key concepts, explain the focus of the sub-projects, and outline how we use the term ‘extreme violence’ in this study.

The question of *how* the Netherlands waged the war can be decoupled from the question of the legitimacy of the war. Looking back, experts also reach different conclusions on the question of which legal rules and norms should be applied to the war. In the lawsuit filed against the Dutch state by the KUKB, the claimants use the legal framework derived from the Dutch standpoint, in which the Dutch armed forces perpetrated violence against Dutch subjects and not against the citizens of a sovereign state of Indonesia. The question of the applicability of international humanitarian law is not easy to answer, given the different viewpoints concerning the characterization of the war, and also because it was precisely this area of law that was very much in development during this period. There are, however, powerful arguments for the view that the core rules of international humanitarian law were already applicable during the conflict – or in any case were declared applicable by the Netherlands<sup>26</sup> – and that many of the actions that we, following the lead of many scholars, categorize as ‘extreme violence’ were at odds with these rules, just as much of the extreme violence was in conflict with national law. Taking a legal-theoretical approach to the question of the nature of the violence is not the most obvious course for a historical study. What is more important to us is to establish what normative and legal framework the Dutch political and military authorities themselves used in the period 1945–1949 to assess what forms of violence were permissible or not. What rules of conduct did they impose on the soldiers? And to what extent were these rules upheld? Another question that we encountered in the course of the research is how individual soldiers reflected on their own sense of justice about the use of violence and in particular the extreme forms of violence. Did they feel there was a clear threshold between what was and was not acceptable?<sup>27</sup>

It is not only words such as ‘war’ and ‘police actions’ that are loaded with often implicit meanings; this holds true for many terms — especially in relation to the colonial past. Terminology matters. This study tries to distance itself from the often-implicit assumptions and judgments embedded in the word usage of the past, because these words were steeped in a specific colonial perspective and lay at the root of a one-sided framing. Dutch-language sources often barely distinguish between different groups of adversaries. In addition to quite neutral terms such as ‘the enemy’ and ‘freedom fighters’, the Dutch documents primarily use characterizations such as ‘terrorists’, ‘extremists’, ‘bandits’, ‘*rampokkers*’ and ‘gangs’, thus essentially disqualifying every incidence of armed resistance as criminal and depicting enemy forces in such a way as to encourage the use of violence against them. This study avoids loaded descriptions such as these, but does so without lapsing into disingenuous language as regards Indonesian acts of violence.

The misleading term ‘police actions’ is only used as a historical term for the two specific military operations (Operation Product and Operation Kraai) and is mirrored by the use of the terms *Agresi Militer Belanda 1* and *2*. And in referring to the Indonesian archipelago, we generally use the term ‘Indonesia’, certainly when referring to the period after the capitulation of Japan. From a strictly legal perspective, this is an anachronism. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that this term had been widely used since the late nineteenth century and that even the Dutch authorities had begun to use it from 1948, for example in their aim to bring about a United States of Indonesia and in their changing of the ‘I’ in KNIL from ‘Indies’ to ‘Indonesian’.

The designation and spelling of Indonesian names and locations are not neutral, either. We chose to use the contemporary Indonesian designations and spelling instead of the colonial terms, except in the obvious case of citations. Terms such as ‘Batavia’ or ‘the East Indies government’ are only used to indicate the colonial context.

## THE INDONESIAN VIOLENCE AND BERSIAP

This study focuses on questions concerning *Dutch* violence and not Indonesian violence. The intra-Indonesian violence that was an inherent part of the process of state-building during the Indonesian Revolution is discussed only briefly, while in the Dutch source material it is referred to frequently, partly as a trigger and sometimes an excuse for Dutch violence.

In the Indonesian historiography and above all in public perception

(schoolbooks, museums, media), the armed struggle against the Netherlands – and also against the Japanese and British troops – is characterized as justified, collective and also often as heroic. At the national level, little attention is given to Indonesian victimhood. The entire period is often simply referred to as the Indonesian Revolution, which both emphasizes that independence was a historical fact on 17 August 1945 and evokes an image of social transformation. The fact that extreme violence also occurred on the Indonesian side is not denied, but this has thus far not played a major role in the Indonesian historiography. The emphasis lies on the legitimate nature of the struggle against what is described as Dutch aggression. This emphasis is reflected in the way that not only the guerrilla war but also the battles such as in Surabaya, Semarang and Ambarawa are showcased. Themes such as violence against the (Indo-)Europeans, the Chinese and other communities and individuals suspected of collaborating with the Dutch did not play a major role in the official narrative. The same holds for a theme such as *bersiap*, which has only recently begun to receive explicit attention.<sup>28</sup>

In the Dutch government's letter informing the lower house of its intention to finance this research study, explicit reference was made to the Indonesian violence that was a part of 'the difficult context in which Dutch soldiers had to operate'. In this context, the government also pointed to 'the suffering of the victims of "*bersiap*" as well as their families'.<sup>29</sup> The violence during *bersiap* has been described by previous researchers and also in the memoirs of those who were involved, and we have continued this research. This is significant because during this violent period, thousands of – primarily (Indies) Dutch and Chinese people became the victims of extreme violence and because it was an episode that had long-lasting repercussions that received little attention for a long time, including in the Netherlands. This research is important also because the impact of this period may have influenced the way in which the Dutch armed forces perceived and fought against the opponent. In our research on *bersiap*, we have explicitly sought to take a broader perspective and to encompass all the victims of the 'spiral of violence', focusing on a comprehensive analysis of culpability and motives. We have also explored the significance given to this violence from the Dutch perspective, both at the time and later.

### THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

From the very beginning, the three institutes have indicated that the research seeks to understand, analyse and explain the Dutch war violence in

a broader context. The goal is not to deliver political, moral or legal judgments. It was our implicit intention to contribute to not only the scholarly debates, but also to the reflection taking place within society on this dramatic episode in Dutch colonial history.

The conclusions of this research support the views that have been articulated in recent years by an increasing number of historians, namely that the Dutch armed forces resorted to extreme violence not on an incidental basis, but rather on a structural basis. The official line of 1969 does not square with what we now know. This immediately raises questions about the responsibility of the military command and more importantly about political responsibility – prior to and during the war but also in the period thereafter when, as will become clear, the policies adopted were seldom aimed at ‘establishing the truth’. We return to this point in Part III and in the Conclusions of this book.



## 2.

# The Netherlands and Indonesia 1945-1949

## The political-historical context

GERT OOSTINDIE

The proclamation of Indonesian independence on 17 August 1945 and the subsequent war were preceded by a long period of Dutch colonial rule and a brief but consequential period of Japanese occupation. This chapter describes this history very briefly, with an emphasis on the political history. It should be emphasized that in the Indonesian historiography, the role of the Dutch is given much less attention, as other perspectives come to the fore and other questions are asked.<sup>1</sup> In Chapter 3, the military history from 1945 to 1949 is outlined. The aim of this and the following chapter is to provide a context in which to understand the conduct of the Dutch armed forces.

### THE COLONIAL ERA

In the fifteenth century, Portugal and Spain were the first European countries to establish overseas empires. Other states including the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands soon followed. In the centuries that follo-

*On 17 August 1945, Sukarno proclaims the independent Republic of Indonesia, accompanied by Mohammad Hatta (on the right of the picture). Source: Frans Mendur, ANRI/IPPHOS.*

wed, Europe became a dominant force in a world that was becoming increasingly globalized, partly owing to the raw materials and agricultural products extracted from the colonies, which subsequently also functioned as markets for Europe's industrial products. The start of Dutch colonial rule in the Indonesian archipelago is often dated around 1600. This is a somewhat misleading representation of history. In fact, it took until the end of the Aceh War, around 1910, for the entire archipelago to be brought more or less under Dutch control.<sup>2</sup> During the period of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands, the Dutch East India Company or VOC (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 1602-1799) only exercised territorial authority in a limited number of places – in particular West Java and the Moluccas. The VOC period is sometimes referred to as a period of commercial colonialism, even though the VOC took the first parts of the archipelago by brute force and made use of coercion and armed action even in its trade practices. During the Napoleonic Wars, the colony was temporarily in British hands. With the establishment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (1813/1815), a period of large-scale military and administrative subjugation began, first mainly on Java and then in the rest of the archipelago. And in this way, the Dutch East Indies gradually took shape as the territorial unit that ultimately became the Republic of Indonesia.

The establishment, expansion and consolidation of Dutch colonial authority were accompanied by much violence. The number of armed conflicts and larger wars that the VOC and later the Kingdom of the Netherlands waged in the archipelago runs into the many hundreds, and the number of victims into the hundreds of thousands.<sup>3</sup> The threat and actual use of force were indispensable to the construction and consolidation of the colonial state, but violence alone could not be the basis for a reasonably stable colonial state, especially since the number of Europeans was negligible compared to the total population. The Dutch therefore preferred to exercise authority via the Indonesian elites, a large and heterogeneous group of aristocrats who were forced or induced to cooperate during successive stages of colonial expansion. Those who refused were confronted with intimidation and, if necessary, violence. The result was that on the eve of the Japanese occupation in 1942, there was a colonial state with an extremely small Dutch upper class that ruled through a dual administration, a richly varied system in which Indonesian administrators drawn from local Indonesian elites worked alongside their Dutch counterparts and were given considerable room within the margins of the colonial system to represent their own interests as well.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, ‘the East Indies’ was developed further and further into an economic colony. On Java, the Cultivation System (*Cultuurstelsel*, 1830-1870) – which made use of forced labour, one of the elements lampooned in the famous novel *Max Havelaar* by the Dutch writer Multatuli – yielded unprecedented profits. The subsequent ‘liberal’ period led to a boom in the plantation sector on this island and also on Sumatra. In some circles in the Netherlands there was growing discomfort with the one-sided benefits that this colonial success story yielded, especially in the light of the glaring inequality in Indonesia itself. Sometime around 1900, this led to what was presented as a new approach focused on improving the welfare of the population, the ‘Ethical Policy’ programme. This did not, however, put an end to the exploitation of the land and its people, for the colony remained of crucial importance to the Dutch economy. Nonetheless, the advocates of the Ethical Policy argued that more of the benefits gained should be invested in modernizing the colony, thereby allowing for the ‘elevation’ of the Indonesian population. This policy, which in comparison with the previous period could arguably be called enlightened, coincided with a final, decidedly aggressive phase of territorial expansion and consolidation in which the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (Koninklijk Nederlands-Indische Leger, KNIL) killed many tens of thousands of Indonesians, especially during the Aceh War. It was also precisely in these years that a widespread system of indentured labour arose, including on the plantations of Sumatra, exploiting workers who had almost no rights at all.

From a European perspective, colonialism was hardly controversial; indeed, internal wars and conflicts were mainly about who was allowed to appropriate which part of the world. This led to constant conflict and to the continual redistribution of territories, not only in the decades preceding the First World War but also thereafter, when Germany was forced to cede its colonies. The United States had meanwhile also become a colonial power – as had Japan, which led to unrest in Europe and the United States. At this point in time, colonialism was not generally considered controversial in the Western-dominated global political arena and international law, although the Americans were somewhat more critical than the European powers and in 1936 had even promised the Philippines independence within a decade. Only China and especially the Soviet Union – which was itself a product of imperial expansion – spoke out against Western imperialism, but this carried little weight in the world at the time. Before the Second World War, the

Soviet Union offered an ideological alternative that inspired anti-colonial movements worldwide, but its geopolitical power was not very significant yet. Moreover, the influence of communist parties in European colonial states was limited.

In this context, unlike within the colony itself, the Dutch East Indies in 1940 was a virtually uncontested entity in the international political and legal arena dominated by the West, just like the colonies of other Western powers. This partly explains why, in 1945, the Netherlands and initially other Western states took as more or less self-evident the 'restoration' of colonial affairs – or at least Dutch oversight over a possible decolonization process. And it also explains why Indonesia's independence was not immediately recognized internationally in 1945 but only in 1949, after the Netherlands had transferred sovereignty – under significant international pressure but formally speaking voluntarily – to the United States of Indonesia, which on Dutch insistence remained attached to the Kingdom of the Netherlands in a Union.

## INDONESIAN NATIONALISM AND COLONIAL REPRESSION

From the outset, colonialism was governed by economic and geopolitical motives, or more specifically the self-interest of the European states concerned. The subjugation of and control over the population of the conquered territories implied an inherent threat – and, if necessary, also the use – of military force. The same applied to the organization of additional labour through the slave trade and slavery, forced crop cultivation, or forms of contract labour that often bordered on wage slavery. All this was legitimized by European assumptions about racial and cultural superiority; and by extension, all colonial societies had a racial order, which came in many variants. To widely varying degrees, European powers focused on spreading their own culture – including language and religion – in their colonies. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the motive of economic modernization and the related motive of social modernization based on the Western model became increasingly important, not only as a way to confer legitimization but also as an additional mission of the empire.

The Dutch East Indies – the core of the Dutch 'empire' which by then only consisted, beyond the Netherlands itself, of Suriname and six small Caribbean islands – was no exception to this rule.<sup>4</sup> On the eve of the Japanese occupation, colonial society was more or less divided into three

socio-legal categories. Totalling around 300,000, the (Indo-)European population accounted for less than half a per cent of the total population of about 70 million; interestingly, the small number of Japanese residents were included in this category. The second category was 'Foreign Easterners', mainly Chinese immigrants and their descendants but also Arabs, in all a few per cent of the population. The vast majority, the 'indigenous population', were – apart from the local aristocrats – at the bottom of the social ladder in their own country. They were the colonial authority's subjects, virtually deprived of education even under the 'Ethical Policy'. Indeed, in 1930, 97 per cent of the population was illiterate, at least in the Latin script, even if many did have a certain knowledge of the Javanese or Arabic script. Ethnically speaking, the boundaries between the three classes were not watertight. In the interwar period, a limited number of families from the Indonesian and Chinese elites were legally 'put on an equal footing' with the European population, which among other things secured them better legal protection and access to a good education. However, this did not substantially overturn the racial colonial order, either socially or politically.

The establishment of colonial authority provoked resistance from the outset – both passive resistance and, as demonstrated by the long series of skirmishes and wars, often active and militant resistance. Until the twentieth century, however, this resistance was of a local or regional nature and was dependent on pragmatic considerations and the attitude of the local elites. This changed with the emergence of a nationalist movement that took on an increasingly ideological character and began to encompass the entire archipelago – mirroring the colonial state's archipelago-wide 'pacification policy'. Important moments in this process include the creation of Budi Utomo (1908), the Sarekat Islam (1912), the East Indies Party (1912), the Partai Komunis Indonesia (1924), the Indonesian Society/Perhimpunan Indonesia (1922-1925) and Sukarno's Partai Nasional Indonesia (1927). At the Kongres Pemuda (youth congress) in 1928, the Sumpah Pemuda (Youth Pledge) was sworn ('one country – Indonesia, one people – the Indonesian people, and one language – Indonesian') and the national anthem 'Indonesia Raya' was sung for the first time.

These movements and organizations differed significantly from each other; some had a pronounced national character, while others were more regional. In addition, they disagreed about the importance that should be attributed to religion and especially Islam, and they also differed in terms of

political affiliation (liberal, socialist, communist). These differences had an impact on each organization's willingness to compromise with the colonial authority and its preference for either gradualism or armed struggle. What united all these movements, however, was their strong criticism of the colonial system.

Indonesian nationalism was never fully understood on the Dutch side and was in any case dismissed, barring a few exceptions. This observation requires some clarification and nuance. First of all, a distinction must be made between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies, and between politics and society. In the Netherlands, there were different views across the political spectrum on colonial policy, but only some left-wing intellectual circles, revolutionary socialists, and the small communist party categorically rejected colonialism, the latter under the slogan 'Indonesia separate from Holland now!'. Within the Social Democratic Workers' Party (Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij, SDAP), the predominant position was that the exploitation should stop but that an independent Indonesia was something for the distant future. The other parties were significantly more cautious. Three arguments against the 'surrender' of the colony were invariably put forward. First, there was the economic importance of the colony, expressed in the greatly exaggerated metaphor that the Dutch East Indies was the 'cork' on which the Dutch economy floated. Then there was the geopolitical argument that without the East Indies (the small Caribbean colonies hardly counted in this line of reasoning), the Netherlands would become internationally insignificant or would be relegated 'to a country of the rank of Denmark', in a post-war figure of speech. Finally, there was also the more paternalistic argument that drew on the Ethical Policy, which posited that there was still so much important work the Netherlands could do for the colony and its people, which also had to be protected against its own elites. In 1945, this reasoning came to be coupled with the belief that the Netherlands first had to complete this development task – which had been brutally interrupted by the Japanese occupation – before the East Indies could stand on its own two feet. The parliamentary debates before the war – and initially also after the war – encapsulated the following mindset: that the Netherlands could not do without the East Indies, and the East Indies certainly could not do without the Netherlands.

That was politics – dominated by outspoken colonial views which were also fully shared by Queen Wilhelmina, as evidenced by her support for the

cult surrounding Governor General Johannes van Heutsz, the ‘pacificator’ of Aceh. The monarch’s feelings were also reflected in the obvious reluctance with which she discussed post-war decolonization with the war cabinet in London. Whether and in what way colonialism – and in particular the far East Indies – was a topic in Dutch society is more difficult to determine. What is clear is that in institutions such as churches, schools, the press, popular culture and even the arts, colonialism was usually presented as self-evident. Since these institutions were closely tied to the political parties, given the social and religious stratification (‘pillarization’) of Dutch society, there was little room – and probably little enthusiasm – in the various constituencies for dissenting views. This docility played a major role in the post-war decolonization policy.

In the Dutch East Indies itself, the population group classified as ‘European’ was more closely linked with the colonial administration. On the eve of the Japanese occupation, roughly one-third of this group consisted of so-called *totoks*, the term used for Dutch people and other white Westerners. The Europeans, and in particular the *totoks*, were dominant in the higher positions in business and in the colonial administration. The majority of this legal population group, however, was made up of people of mixed European-Asian descent, also referred to as Indo-Europeans or Indos, a term that had a negative connotation at the time. Most of their families had lived in the colony for generations, and some had a family tree that went back to the seventeenth century. While the *totoks* often belonged to the higher classes, the Indo-European population was more stratified in socio-economic and cultural terms. Their position – between the *totoks* on the one hand and the Chinese middle class, the indigenous aristocracy, and the emerging Indonesian middle class on the other – was fragile. This was equally true of some ethnic groups that had acquired a more or less privileged position within the colonial administration and army, in particular Christians from the Moluccas, Minahasa and Timor – groups that were collectively referred to as the ‘Ambonese’.

Unsurprisingly, the identification of all these groups with the colonial system led them almost collectively to adopt outspoken reactionary positions on Indonesian nationalism, colonial reforms and certainly also independence. In the 1930s, for example, the radical right-wing Patriotic Club was popular among the European population (even among Indos), as was the East Indian branch of the fascist National Socialist Movement (Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, NSB), which incidentally placed

less emphasis on ‘racial purity’ than the party in the Netherlands did. It is perhaps surprising that it was precisely in *totok* circles – where Indonesians were not represented – that a small group of social democratically oriented civil servants was involved in advocating the re-evaluation and eventual dismantling of the colonial system over time, albeit under Dutch leadership. Some key players in the post-war years emerged from this so-called Stuwgroep, including Hubertus van Mook, Johann Logemann, and Jan Jonkman. Van Mook later became lieutenant governor-general of the Dutch East Indies, while Logemann and Jonkman successively became Minister of Overseas Territories for the Dutch Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid, PvdA).

These voices did not, however, result in real reform of the colonial administration in the pre-war period. Under the Dutch Ethical Policy, the People’s Council – a kind of consultative parliament – was established in 1918, with one part of the membership elected by the European population and the other part made up of ‘natives’, Chinese and Arabs who had been designated by the Governor-General. The People’s Council did not advocate any radical changes. In any case, real power lay not with this council but with the Governor-General, even if he was formally required for certain topics to submit bills to the People’s Council for consultation. The successive holders of this position followed what were clearly different policies: while Alexander Idenburg (1909-1916), Johan Paul van Limburg Stirum (1916-1921) and Dirk Fock (1921-1926) were considered somewhat reformist, Andries de Graeff (1926-1931) was a transitional figure and Bonifacius de Jonge (1931-1936) and A.W.L. Tjarda van Starkenborgh Stachouwer (1936-1942) were decidedly conservative. The Dutch government’s policy also became increasingly conservative, certainly under Prime Minister Hendrik Colijn (1925-1926 and 1933-1939), who had himself been involved in various bloody military campaigns as a KNIL officer. Initially, Indonesian nationalism was more or less tolerated by the Dutch, but from the late 1920s onwards merciless repression was the watchword, especially following some communist-inspired uprisings on Java (in 1926) and Sumatra (in 1927). From that moment on, nationalism and communism were often mentioned in one and the same breath within colonial circles, which demonstrated a fundamental ignorance with regard to what was going on and how Indonesian nationalism was developing.

The architect Sukarno, who had graduated from the Technical College of Bandung, developed into the most prominent nationalist in the pre-war

years. He was continuously coming into conflict with the colonial administration, which had him imprisoned twice and then exiled: once briefly in Bandung (1930-1931), and the second time for longer, when he was exiled to Flores and then Bengkulu (1934-1942). Thousands of others were also exiled, including Mohammad Hatta and Sutan Sjahrir (who later became the first prime minister of Indonesia), who had both studied in the Netherlands. They were political prisoners from 1934 to 1942, partly in the Upper Digul camp deep in the inhospitable eastern region of New Guinea (Papua). The colonial response to Indonesian nationalism essentially came down to the development of an authoritarian state in which the colonial army and the police played a crucial role.

The repression of the 1930s set the tone in many ways for what was to take place in the next decade. This hard line was successful in that the leaders of the nationalist movement were isolated and the colonial authority felt less threatened. But this apparent calm led to complacency and to a serious underestimation of the power of nationalism. Governor-General De Jonge publicly declared in 1935 that, 'now that we have worked here in the East Indies for three hundred years, it will be another three hundred years before the East Indies might be ripe for a form of independence'.<sup>5</sup> Also after 1945, the direct and painful experience of Dutch repression, together with the knowledge that the colonial mentality would not disappear overnight, fuelled the Indonesians' distrust of the sincerity of the Dutch decolonization policy – that is, if Indonesians even accepted the idea that the old colonizer still had a role to play.

## THE JAPANESE PERIOD

Colonialism is not the exclusive prerogative of European countries, neither is the euphemistic framing of colonialism. The United States also went down this path, as did Japan. The Japanese colonial expansion began with the occupation of a series of islands in the Pacific Ocean, then Taiwan (1895), Korea (1910), Manchuria (1931) and parts of China (1937). After its attack on the American war fleet at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, Japan went on to take most of the European colonies in East, Southeast and South Asia. From the 1930s, Japan had framed its policy of expansion as 'the liberation of Asia'. The invasion of the Dutch East Indies began around the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942, and just over two months later, on 9 March, army commander Henk ter Poorten capitulated. He was taken prisoner of war, and Governor-General Tjarda was interned. In no

time at all, the Dutch colonial system had been defeated and humiliated for all to see. The archipelago now belonged to the Japanese empire, which championed 'Asia for Asians' but which essentially began a new colonial occupation.

In retrospect, the Japanese victory in Indonesia sealed the fate of the Dutch East Indies. However, this was far from evident to the Dutch in 1942 or even in 1945. The Second World War and in particular the Japanese occupation were decisive for the way in which Indonesia gained independence. First of all, this world war ushered in a process of decolonization worldwide, one in which developments in a series of empires and the American attitude in the subsequent new war (now a Cold War) reinforced each other. Furthermore, the Japanese occupation generated considerable political, intellectual, psychological and military momentum for Indonesian nationalism, whereas the Dutch colonial administrative machinery had been removed. Finally, the fact that key Dutch players were isolated during the war reinforced their already deep-seated underestimation of that nationalism. These last two factors require a brief explanation.

The Japanese occupation of Indonesia was colonial in nature, geared towards ruthless exploitation. This worsened as the Allied advance progressively weakened Japan's position. This led to severe impoverishment and famine as well as the recruitment of several million forced labourers – known as *romusha* – to work in Indonesia or elsewhere in Japan's Asian empire. The demographic toll of the three years of Japanese occupation was enormous, with an estimated three million deaths on Java alone and perhaps four million in the entire archipelago out of a total population of about 70 million Indonesians.<sup>6</sup> The deep crisis in large parts of the archipelago led to acute social tensions that in the aftermath of the Japanese occupation gave rise to violence against local indigenous administrators and Chinese traders, who were accused of having benefited from the economic crisis.

Japan's colonial exploitation of the Indonesian population went hand in hand with a steadily increasing political and military mobilization. Immediately after the Dutch capitulation, Japan released all political exiles. A number of them, including Sukarno and Hatta, were subsequently heavily involved in the Japanese-led mobilization of the Indonesian population. These nationalist leaders later insisted that they had to seize this opportunity – which the Netherlands had never given them – in order to eventually achieve independence via a roundabout route. Other nationalists such as

Sjahrir opted for non-cooperation. But in the first years of the Japanese occupation, even Sukarno and his men were given little room to follow their own political course. It was only in the last months of the occupation that Japan reluctantly started to cooperate with preparations for independence. This was certainly opportunistic of the Japanese, but it was further than the Netherlands had ever been willing to go.

As the military situation deteriorated, the Japanese occupiers started to invest more in the – partly forced – recruitment of Indonesians to local combat groups under Japanese command. These militias were meant to contribute to the fight against the Allies, but this never happened, since Japan capitulated on 15 August 1945, before there was an Allied invasion of Java and Sumatra. But in the meantime, Japan had trained and enlisted hundreds of thousands of Indonesians in various auxiliary corps. These groups did go on to make an important contribution to the fight against two Allied powers, first the British and then the Dutch, but not in defence of the Japanese empire, but of Indonesian independence. The Japanese contribution to this military struggle lay mainly in the recruitment and the training prior to 15 August 1945 and, thereafter, in the large number of weapons that the Japanese handed over to the Indonesians, voluntarily or otherwise. In addition, a small number of Japanese soldiers joined the Indonesian struggle.<sup>7</sup>

And now a few words on the isolated position of the Dutch. From May 1940, the Dutch war cabinet had been based in London. Until the Japanese invasion, this war cabinet had had to leave the administration of the colony to the Dutch East Indies government until the latter was forced to move to Australia as a result of the Japanese occupation. With more reluctance than commitment, and under strong pressure from the Americans and to a lesser extent the British, who understood that the legitimacy of the Allied war efforts depended partly on the promise of decolonization, the Dutch war cabinet set out to write a declaration in the spirit of the Atlantic Charter of 14 August 1941. This led to the much-quoted ‘7 December speech’ (1942) in which Queen Wilhelmina promised post-war reforms in relatively vague terms. This declaration was preceded by intense internal discussions that reflected a blatant colonial mentality. A plea by the only Indonesian member of the war cabinet, Ario Sujono, for the Netherlands to offer the promise of full independence, was never given a chance. The result was a declaration that was ‘too little, too late’ in the eyes of the Indonesian nationalists but was cited in Dutch circles long after the war as proof that the government had indeed understood the signs of the times

and was sincerely striving for a new arrangement for the archipelago. Given all that had gone before, this is questionable. Either way, the Dutch held on to the quintessentially colonial view that they should be in charge of the process of decolonization.

The Dutch cabinet's isolation in London and the lack of reliable information about developments in Indonesia perpetuated the Dutch underestimation of the nationalist movement. It also reinforced their fierce resentment against nationalists like Sukarno, who were portrayed as puppets of the Japanese regime with no meaningful support from their own population. This resentment and this misconception were shared by most of the Dutch who were released from the internment camps after the Japanese capitulation, as well as by the few pre-war colonial administrators who had fled to Australia. It is in this context that we should view Van Mook's initial assessment that nationalism and the *proklamasi* did not amount to much. A few days before the declaration of independence, he wrote that he returned to the archipelago 'to find millions of Indonesians who are [...] entirely on our side.' A week later, he noted 'the last cries of despair of Sukarno, who knows he has lost'; a month later, in early October 1945, he promised to have him caught 'in a cage'.<sup>8</sup> Two weeks after this, however, Van Mook had changed his mind, this time advocating direct discussions with Sukarno and his group and foreseeing Indonesian autonomy, albeit within the Dutch kingdom and not for another 25 years. But his kindred spirit in the 'Stuwgroep', Logemann, who was now Minister of Overseas Territories, declared in parliament that any discussion with Sukarno and his group would be 'as unworthy as it would be fruitless', adding that everything was aimed at 'making the East Indies understand that it is a blessing to be a part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands'. His words were met with overwhelming applause.<sup>9</sup>

Playing a role in all this were not only political beliefs, colonial sentiments (ethical or not) or missionary ambitions, which was an important factor for the Christian parties in the Netherlands, but also – and especially – hard economic and geopolitical interests. The majority of the Dutch East Indian and Dutch business community wanted nothing more than to have their privileged pre-war economic positions restored. And those in government circles felt very strongly that the colonial connection was crucial for the post-war reconstruction of the Netherlands and for retaining a somewhat prominent place in world politics.



*The signing of the ceasefire agreement on 14 October 1946 at the British Consulate General in Jakarta. From left to right: Wim Schermerhorn (chairman of the General Commission), the British intermediary Lord Killearn, and Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir.*

Source: Netherlands Indies Government Information Service, Nationaal Archief/Anefo.

## THE INDONESIAN REVOLUTION

On 17 August 1945, Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta proclaimed the independence of Indonesia in a short but ground-breaking declaration. This moment was preceded by hectic and emotional deliberations. Almost a year earlier, in September 1944, the Japanese authorities had declared for the first time that they wanted to cooperate in a controlled transfer of power – albeit in still vague and therefore disappointing terms for Sukarno and his circle. As Japan's position deteriorated, the Japanese leaders decided to give the nationalists more leeway, and the first concrete steps were taken towards an independent state. This preparation for independence ended abruptly with the sudden Japanese capitulation on 15 August, nine and six days after American atomic bombs had fallen on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively. The capitulation came as a surprise even for the Japanese commanders in Jakarta, and it meant that they were obliged to maintain the status quo, protect the internees and cooperate in the process of demobilizing and repa-

triating their own armed forces. Cooperating in the establishment of a new republic was explicitly not covered by this mandate.

What followed was a frenzy in which various Japanese military leaders played different roles and radical nationalist youths (*pemuda*) kidnapped Sukarno and forced him to proclaim independence immediately, instead of waiting for the Japanese to present it to them. This culminated in a sleepless night in which the brief text of the *proklamasi* was written (in Indonesian, naturally) at the home of the Japanese rear admiral Tadashi Maeda in Jakarta: 'We, the people of Indonesia, hereby declare Indonesia independent. Matters relating to the transfer of power and other issues will be settled in an orderly manner and as soon as possible.' The next morning, on 17 August, Sukarno read this text out to a small audience and, along with Hatta, signed it 'on behalf of the Indonesian people' as the first president and vice president of the Republic. The date of the signing still followed the Japanese calendar.

And so it was that on 17 August, the formative years of the Republic of Indonesia were brought to an end. This is now recognized by the Netherlands, but at the time this was not the case. The message of the proclamation was brushed aside by the Dutch, and it would only sink in much later. On Java, the message spread rapidly, but it took weeks before the news was known everywhere in Indonesia.

The Republic now had to build a state and expand from its core (Java and to a much lesser degree Sumatra). A parliament was formed, a constitution was adopted and public services had to be maintained and strengthened. This state formation took years and was made significantly more difficult by the fight against the Netherlands and by internal conflicts. In the eyes of the Republicans, the fight against the Netherlands was a rebellion against the former colonizer's attempt to 'reoccupy' the country – a term that was initially also used by the Dutch army command. Seen in this way, the Dutch-Indonesian war was 'merely' a part of the Indonesian Revolution. This book is mainly about that war of independence, but it is necessary to say a little more about that revolution and more specifically about the most important internal contradictions during the Indonesian Revolution.

When the Republic of Indonesia was proclaimed, its leaders envisioned a religiously neutral, socially progressive unitary state. The foundations of the state that was to be established were already laid on 1 June 1945, as an introduction to the constitution, in the 'Pancasila' – the five pillars. The guiding

motto was ‘unity in Indonesia.’ However, there were strong currents within the country that rejected these principles or that espoused more radical doctrines. This led to internal political and military conflicts that caused divisions not only during the war with the Netherlands, but also long thereafter.

The top priority was the Republic’s claim on the entire territory of the Dutch East Indies as a unitary state. This had been the guiding principle already before the war in the most important nationalist movements, and it went without saying that it would be maintained in 1945. However, there were movements scattered throughout the archipelago that sought a degree of regional autonomy – ambitions that were not in line with the principle of a unitary state. For example, there was resistance in some regions, such as Aceh and parts of the Moluccas, to being ruled by the demographically dominant island of Java. In Eastern Indonesia, there was a strong desire among the elite for regional autonomy, which many felt could easily be combined with an independent federal Indonesia. Even within Java itself, such regionalism existed. In the partly Sundanese West Java, plans were made to establish an autonomous state of Pasundan in 1947, the leaders of which nonetheless unequivocally stated that they wanted to be part of an independent Indonesia.

The Dutch attempt to create a federal United States of Indonesia (Republik Indonesia Serikat, RIS) instead of a unitary Republic initially joined these centrifugal forces. But the paternalistic way in which this policy was implemented, and its overly emphatic divide-and-conquer strategy mainly aimed at isolating the Republic, gave federalism a bad name and weakened it politically. While the Netherlands appeared to have achieved part of its goals when sovereignty was transferred to the federal United States of Indonesia in 1949, this turned out to be an illusion. Within a year, Indonesia had been transformed into a unitary state. A few failed subversive actions in 1950 – namely the APRA coup led by former KNIL captain Raymond Westerling in Bandung<sup>10</sup> and actions of KNIL soldiers in Makassar and on the Moluccas – gave Sukarno the perfect argument for transforming Indonesia into a unitary state. In the 1950s, several uprisings were crushed or nipped in the bud by the Republic, and even thereafter tensions continued to flare up between the unitary state and regional movements.

The Pancasila does not define Indonesia as a secular state, but neither is it described as an Islamic state: the guiding principle of belief in ‘the only God’ encompasses two major monotheistic religions (Islam and Christian-

ity) and was interpreted in such a way that there was also room for Buddhism, Hinduism, and later also Confucianism. This liberal approach was in direct opposition to the view that an independent Indonesia should be an Islamic state, given that some 90 per cent of the population adhered to this religion. Between 1945 and 1949 and long thereafter, the Republic fought against radical Islamic movements such as Darul Islam. Regional and religious resistance overlapped regularly, as in Aceh.

The other three pillars of the Pancasila – alongside ‘unity in diversity’ and ‘belief in the one and only God’ – are humanity, democracy and social justice. There was no consensus on how these concepts should be implemented. Social democratic beliefs were strongly present within the nationalist movement, including in Sjahrir’s socialist party and the Islamic Masyumi. But there was also an important communist movement, part of which was organized in the PKI, the communist party, as well as supporters of Amir Sjarifuddin and Tan Malaka. During the war years, there were in fact armed confrontations between the Republic and the PKI, culminating in the Madiun uprising in September 1948. This was to have a long and violent sequel after 1949, leading to the mass killings of (alleged) communists in 1965 and 1966.

The internal tensions within the nationalist movement gave rise to political instability. Between 1 September 1945 and 20 December 1950, the Republic had ten different cabinets: three cabinets under Sutan Sjahrir (14 November 1945 – 3 July 1947), two under Amir Sjarifuddin (3 July 1947 – 29 January 1948) and four under Hatta (29 January 1948 – 6 September 1950). As the entire political leadership of the Republic was imprisoned after Operation Kraai or *Agresi Militer Belanda 2*,<sup>11</sup> an emergency cabinet also formally served under Sjarifuddin Prawiranegara (19 December 1948 – 13 July 1949). After an initial presidential cabinet, all the others were headed by a prime minister, while Sukarno remained president. Cabinet changes reflected disagreements between parties, between political leaders and between politicians and the military; Sukarno remained the unifying factor. None of these cabinets came into being as a result of elections, for the first general elections did not take place until 1955.

In a military sense, too, the Republic of Indonesia was a state under construction. During the war, it was essential for the Republic to develop its own army, in which the motley mixture of battle groups could be united under the command of General Sudirman. This history is explained in more detail in the next chapter. The Republican military command

did not succeed in establishing a monopoly on violence in those years, however. The armed forces waged war against the Netherlands but also had to fight against Indonesian groups that were regionally, religiously and/or politically driven, and there were also internal conflicts within the Republican army itself. In addition, there was constant tension between the army and the political leadership of the Republic, as the latter made concessions in the negotiation process more often than the army leadership and radical revolutionary groups felt was acceptable. These tensions ran high on several occasions in early 1949, but did not result in a rift or a military coup. Instead, the Republic and its army, the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI), jointly achieved victory in the Indonesian War of Independence.

### THE BRITISH INTERREGNUM

During the Second World War, all of Indonesia – with the exception of Sumatra – was part of the allied South West Pacific Area (SWPA) under the command of the American General Douglas MacArthur. When Japan capitulated, the SWPA was abolished, and Indonesia came under the British-led South East Asia Command (SEAC). At that moment, more than 100,000 Allied soldiers were already present in some eastern islands and particularly in New Guinea. Yet it was not until the beginning of September that the first British SEAC soldiers arrived on Java and Sumatra. Their main task was to demobilize and repatriate the Japanese army, to implement the orderly evacuation of the Japanese internment and prisoner-of-war camps, and in general to enforce the law.<sup>12</sup> The British wanted to avoid becoming involved in the Indonesian-Dutch conflict, but they inevitably did become entangled. In the Dutch view, the British had sent out entirely the wrong signal by recognizing the Republic as an interlocutor as early as September 1945. On the Indonesian side, the arrival of British troops, often accompanied by Dutch civil servants, was seen as the beginning of a colonial reoccupation – a view that appeared to be confirmed by the violent action of the British against Republican fighter groups, especially in the Battle of Surabaya in November 1945. Although the British did put pressure on the Netherlands to take its place at the negotiating table, in practice they acted in close consultation with the Dutch authorities and ultimately transferred authority to the Netherlands – and not the Republic – in the spring of 1946.

A complete reoccupation of the archipelago by the Allies was not on the

agenda – given their limited aims – and was moreover militarily impossible, above all due to the lack of troops. The Allied forces limited themselves to the occupation of seven urban enclaves on Java and Sumatra. The British commander Lieutenant-General Philip Christison, who became convinced that the nationalist movement was stronger than his Dutch interlocutors believed, tried to get the two sides to talk – with mixed success. Meanwhile, the situation in parts of Java and Sumatra was escalating and quickly degenerated into large-scale violence, an episode that later became known in the Netherlands as *bersiap*. This affected the safety of the internees and the capitulated Japanese troops for whom SEAC was responsible, which meant that the British troops unwittingly became party to these conflicts.

On 17 August 1945, the Republic could count on broad support in its own country, certainly much more than the Dutch side presumed. However, real state power was available to the Republic to only a limited degree, and it certainly did not have a monopoly on violence. The first month after the proclamation remained relatively quiet, but after that the violence escalated, partly fuelled by a power vacuum but also as a reaction to the arrival of the British and the Dutch.

This episode of intense violence is discussed in detail in Part II. In brief, several conflicts were waged simultaneously, many of which involved groups lacking any clear-cut command structure. Between September 1945 and March 1946, *pemuda* perpetrated violence – often gruesome – against Europeans, Indo-Europeans and ‘Ambonese’. Estimates of the number of deaths in this period vary widely in the historiography of the Indonesian Revolution, from 3,000 to as many as 30,000. These figures are subjected to a critical analysis elsewhere in this volume.<sup>13</sup> This Indonesian violence must be set against the violence of the KNIL troops and Indonesian hit squads loyal to the Dutch – in total in the order of thousands – which resulted in an unknown number of victims. Indonesian violence was also directed against the Japanese troops, who were unpopular and were now suspected of participating in a colonial reoccupation. The number of Japanese casualties is estimated to have been in the order of 1,000 – higher than the number of Japanese who had died during the conquest of the archipelago. The violence against the Chinese population, which lasted much longer, most likely claimed many more deaths. The violence was also directed against the Indonesian nobility and others who were seen as collaborators with the Dutch and thereafter the Japanese occupiers. There are no reliable figures on

this period, referred to in the Indonesian historiography as *berdaulat*, which continued for years.

The information received by the British army command in Jakarta regarding these waves of violence, while fragmented, was enough for them to realize the seriousness of the situation. For the British, this only underlined the urgency of getting the Republic and the Netherlands to talk. The British interest lay in completing their original tasks and then leaving as soon as possible. The idea was to keep military deployment to a minimum – a deployment that, with a total troop strength of about 60,000 Allied soldiers in a country with 70 million inhabitants, was in any case precarious. Nevertheless, the British were sucked into the war and did not shy away from using hard-hitting measures, as in the bloody Battle of Surabaya.

Politically, the British attitude – that of the newly appointed Labour government and of SEAC commander-in-chief Lord Louis Mountbatten, as well as Christison (who was on the ground) – and the clever negotiating style of Sjahrir forced the Netherlands to backtrack on its initial complete dismissal of the Republic. Part of this pressure was that for months the British refused to allow new Dutch troops in and would not lift this ban until the Dutch were willing to start negotiations with the Republic of Indonesia, which they finally did in March 1946. It was in this context that the Linggarjati Agreement, which is discussed below, was concluded in November of that year. Although this treaty did not ultimately lead to the peaceful acknowledgement of independence, it did allow the British to let the Dutch troops in and hand over authority to the Netherlands before withdrawing in haste.

## THE DUTCH RETURN: POLITICS

It was noted above that the dominant political and military view in the Netherlands immediately after the Second World War, which was fully in line with the dismissive and repressive attitude towards Indonesian nationalism in the preceding years, was that the Republic was a Japanese fabrication. From this point of view, it was necessary for Dutch colonial authority to be restored. This was the conviction not only of the colonial hawks but also of the moderates, who regarded the Dutch return as preparation for a process of decolonization carried out under the auspices of the Netherlands, after which both countries would remain closely linked. The Dutch derived the right to control this decolonization process from its centuries-long presence in Indonesia. We have to keep in mind that Indonesia was by far the largest

of the two countries both in geographical terms (see Map 1) and in demographic terms.<sup>14</sup>

We can conclude in retrospect that this was a serious underestimation of the strength of both the nationalist movement and the profound changes that had taken place in international relations. This is not to say that Dutch policy was completely rigid. In fact, initially there was a steep learning curve on the Dutch side, as evidenced by the decision to start negotiations with the Republic. However, these new insights met with resistance in the Netherlands, and standpoints subsequently hardened again, with the result that even the more moderate protagonists became proponents of a large-scale military deployment. The learning curve was cut prematurely, and successive Dutch governments – trapped in their outdated colonial vision – ended up being overtaken by the facts and also coming under heavy international pressure.

A considerable number of studies have been published on this phase in Dutch policy towards Indonesia and the negotiations that eventually led to the transfer of sovereignty. The focus of this book lies elsewhere, which is why a summary of the Dutch way of thinking and Dutch policy will suffice here. In this brief overview the most important players, their views of the opponent, their objectives and the treaties, as well as the relationship between the political and military measures taken will be highlighted.

For a long time, the Dutch historiography on the Indonesian War of Independence revolved around the political and diplomatic conflict and, by extension, the relationship between the political and military leadership on the Dutch side. There have been two opposing camps in recent decades. On the one hand, there was the view that the Netherlands was driven by an incorrigible colonial mentality throughout the period in question, which puts the blame squarely on the Netherlands. On the other hand, there was a revisionist minority view that emphasized the Netherlands' sincere efforts to bring about a rapid decolonization, efforts that failed partly due to opposition from – or the irreconcilable and untrustworthy position of – the Republic and other parties. In other words, 'If two are fighting, two are to blame', as a Dutch proverb goes. Which of these two camps is correct is less relevant for this research programme's main question concerning the nature and consequences of Dutch military action. What we can say with certainty is that the Netherlands eventually opted for tough military intervention and that the military command insisted on the need for such a firm line.

Before the Second World War, the Indies government in Batavia operated relatively autonomously from the government in The Hague, operating under a governor-general who was able to rule in a relatively autocratic manner with full support from The Hague. The last pre-war governor-general (or 'GG'), A.W.L. Tjarda van Starkenborgh Stachouwer, did not want to return to his post after the war due to his difference of opinion with the new post-war Dutch government on the policy to be pursued in the Dutch East Indies. He was succeeded by a Lieutenant Governor-General, Hubertus van Mook, who held this position until November 1948. Before the Second World War, Van Mook had been a senior civil servant in the Dutch East Indies. Shortly before the capitulation he had left for Australia, where he began preparing a plan for the Dutch return to the archipelago. He later continued this work as Minister of the Colonies in the Dutch war cabinet in London. In April 1944, the Dutch government established the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA) as a forerunner of the government to be restored in the East Indies. In early October 1945, Van Mook was able to return to Jakarta under the protection of the British troops, the militarized NICA and the first units of the KNIL. Once there, he quickly set up an administrative body that was largely staffed by members of the old civil service corps. 'Jakarta' had to go back to being 'Batavia'.

In Jakarta, Van Mook did have to deal with divergent views on the Dutch side, but not with a parliament to which he had to answer. He was, however, accountable to the Dutch government; and this is where 'the Netherlands' becomes a complex concept, because there were differences in opinion among Dutch politicians and also between the successive cabinets. In his three years as Lieutenant Governor-General, Van Mook had to deal with the transitional Schermerhorn-Drees cabinet (June 1945-July 1946), the Beel cabinet (KVP-PvdA, July 1946-August 1948) and until his departure at the end of October 1948 the Drees-Van Schaik cabinet comprising the Catholic People's Party (Katholieke Volkspartij, KVP), the Labour Party (PvdA), the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie, vvd) and the Christian Historical Union (Christen-Historische Unie, CHU), which governed from August 1948 to March 1951. Van Mook frequently acted without waiting for instructions from the Dutch government, such as when he decided to reach out to President Sukarno. Nonetheless, in July 1947, he too wanted to take responsibility for the first so-called 'police action', and over time he began to condemn the Republican government more firmly. Moreover, he has gone down in history as the ar-

chitect of the aborted plans for a federal Indonesia, a construction that the Republic reluctantly accepted for reasons of expediency but actually regarded as an example of colonial divide-and-rule politics.

The KVP and the PvdA dominated the government in The Hague during this period. Under their party leader Carl Romme, the Catholics quite consistently advocated a hard line on Indonesia. When Lieutenant Governor-General Van Mook was replaced by KVP leader Louis Beel in the new position of 'High Representative of the Crown' in late 1948, this hard line prevailed. From the outset, the PvdA was more cautious and also more hesitant than the KVP. Within the party, there was resistance to the restoration of the colonial order and to the use of military force. Nevertheless, PvdA party leader Willem Drees time and again supported and implemented a policy that can only be regarded as colonial. As for the other Dutch political parties, they were as a rule even more radical in their opposition to relinquishing control over the colony or at least over the decolonization process, with the notable exception again being the Community Party of the Netherlands (CPN).

'The Indonesian question', as it came to be called, was a hotly debated topic in this period. The decolonization policy and the war in particular were not completely uncontroversial within Dutch society, but there was no broad-based opposition to the approach taken by the government. Institutions such as churches, trade unions, the press and universities generally kept quiet. In the immediate post-war decades, Dutch society was strictly divided into political-denominational pillars, where obedience was paramount. There were exceptions, of course, such as among former members of the resistance and among the radical left. But opinion polls consistently indicated that there was support for the government's tough policies. There was no opposition to the hasty constitutional amendment of 1946 that made it possible to send conscripts to Indonesia. The number of conscientious objectors ran into the thousands, but only a few per cent explicitly gave political motives as their objection. This is not surprising, given the severe punishments imposed on those who did. There were a few protests and petitions in the Netherlands against the policy of decolonization, but these were always reactionary in nature and meant to prevent the Dutch government from making concessions to the Republic or calling on the government to undo such concessions.

Sukarno, Hatta, the Republic and in fact the entire nationalist movement were at first categorically rejected by most Dutch people involved.

Van Mook was the first player to understand that this had to change. Despite the criticism Van Mook received, the Dutch government was not long thereafter forced under heavy British pressure to sit down and talk with the Republic, thereby *de facto* recognizing the new nation, although Sukarno in particular remained controversial and even hated by the Dutch. Preference was given to those such as Sjahrir who had not cooperated with Japan and who were seen as less anti-Dutch. But it soon became clear that the choice was not for the Netherlands to make.

As mentioned above, the Dutch initially seemed to be on a relatively steep learning curve in terms of their objectives for the colony. The aim was first to achieve victory over the Japanese occupier and then the restoration of Dutch authority. While before 1940 the idea was that independence would only come after a period of three centuries, during and immediately after the Second World War this became a matter of decades, and soon thereafter the time horizon was substantially reduced to a matter of years. On 15 November 1946, the Netherlands signed the Linggarjati Agreement, thereby *de facto* recognizing the Republic and agreeing to the swift realization of independence. The learning curve thus continued. However, the Netherlands demanded that Indonesia become a federal state that remained closely linked to the Netherlands in a Union under the Crown. In the end, ‘Linggarjati’ was signed by both parties but was never implemented because a majority of Dutch politicians felt that too much had been conceded to the Republic, while on the Indonesian side, especially among the army command, there was considerable criticism of the concessions made by the republican government.

The Netherlands continued to pursue the concept of a federal Indonesia and a Union – which would effectively come under Dutch leadership – at the Malino Conference (15–25 July 1946) and in the Renville Agreement (17 January 1948), the Rum-Van Roijen Agreement (7 May 1949) and during the Round Table Conference (RTC) that preceded the formal transfer of sovereignty (27 December 1949). Moreover, the Netherlands initially succeeded in keeping New Guinea (Papua) out of the sovereignty transfer. Less than a year after formally obtaining independence, however, Indonesia dismantled the federation and became a unitary state. The Union never acquired any real significance and was unilaterally denounced by Indonesia in 1956. In 1962–63, the Netherlands was forced – via the United States – to hand over New Guinea to Indonesia following a conflict lasting many years that severely damaged Indonesian-Dutch relations.



*Prime Minister Willem Drees speaks during the transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia in the Royal Palace on Dam Square, 27 December 1949. Next to Drees, from left to right: Sultan Hamid II (chairman of the Federal States), Mohammad Hatta (prime minister of the Republic of Indonesia) and Queen Juliana. Source: Joop van Bilsen, Nationaal Archief/ Anefo.*

Since then, the question has often been raised – to begin with by Queen Juliana during the transfer of sovereignty – why the road to independence was so long and so violent. This question is all the more pressing because there had been the prospect of a negotiated peace in 1946. The answer lies partly in the fact that until the bitter end, the parties involved had deeply differing views on the ultimate aim of the negotiations and the question of who should be in charge. The Netherlands claimed the right to call the shots and was not willing to concede much more than a federal Indonesia and a Union in which the Republic would be reduced to nothing more than a federated state. Moreover, in this view, Indonesia would not be responsible

for matters such as foreign policy and defence. The Republic argued that the Netherlands was an intruder and that the proposals from The Hague reflected the Dutch colonial mentality. The successive compromises that the Republican government was forced to make under the threat of Dutch violence and international pressure – a learning curve in itself – were regarded as necessary but undesirable, and were therefore seen as temporary concessions required to defend independence, concessions that would eventually be reversed.

The clash between these incompatible premises was eventually settled by force. The military commanders on both sides were moreover in favour of taking a hard line, sometimes more so than their political leaders. Having said that, even Sukarno remarked out loud on the day after the transfer of sovereignty that independence would not have been achieved without the armed struggle. There is every reason to believe this was the case.

The following chapter focuses on the Dutch armed forces in the Dutch East Indies and Indonesia. There is a degree of continuity in terms of leadership and mentality that can be seen in the pre-war and post-war KNIL, the colonial army that had a strong influence on the way in which the entire Dutch armed forces in Indonesia thought and operated. Significantly, Army Commander Simon Spoor, supported by the rest of the army command, insisted that a military victory was possible and that victory was a prerequisite for negotiating successfully with the Republic. This revealed an underestimation of the military capacity of the opponent, which was paralleled by the Dutch underestimation of the support for Indonesian nationalism among the population.

The entire period from August 1945 to December 1949 can be regarded – at least in the case of Java – as one continuous period of war, with two short periods of what could be labelled conventional warfare and a very large number of smaller military confrontations. The objective of bringing ‘order and peace’ to the archipelago as a new *pax Neerlandica* resulted in significant violence. The Dutch armed forces carried out two major offensives: ‘Operation Product’ (mid-1947) and ‘Operation Kraai’ (late 1948) – euphemistically referred to for diplomatic reasons as domestic ‘police actions’. As will be discussed in the next chapter, in each case the operation appeared to be a military success but turned into a diplomatic fiasco and a military impasse – the bankruptcy of Spoor’s ‘spearhead strategy’. The TNI increasingly focused on guerrilla warfare, and the Dutch armed forces appeared to

have neither the experience nor the means to find an effective response to this. The result was that the Dutch army could not win the battle and the Indonesian forces managed to sustain the war of attrition. The population suffered the greatest losses.

### POLITICAL AND MILITARY MILESTONES

During the war, periods of negotiations and relative calm were interspersed with episodes of fierce fighting, which exhibited major local and regional differences. The important events in Dutch-Indonesian relations and their aftermath are listed chronologically:

- 15 August 1945: the capitulation of Japan
- 17 August 1945: the *proklamasi* of the Republik Indonesia
- 29 September 1945: the arrival of the first British troops
- September 1945 - March 1946: *bersiap*
- 2 October 1945: the arrival of Van Mook in Jakarta
- 27 October - 20 November 1945: the Battle of Surabaya (Heroes' Day in Indonesia, 10 November)
- 4 January 1946: the relocation of the Republican seat of government from Jakarta to Yogyakarta
- 7 February 1946: the Netherlands declares its intention to strive for a commonwealth with Indonesia
- End of February 1946: the arrival of the first troops from the Netherlands
- 14-24 April 1946: the Hoge Veluwe Conference
- 15-25 July 1946: the Malino Conference
- 14 October 1946: the signing of a truce
- 15 November 1946: the signing of the Linggarjati Agreement
- End of November 1946: the departure of the last British troops
- 7 December 1946: the Den Pasar conference and the establishment of the State of East Indonesia
- 11 December 1946 - 22 February 1947: extrajudicial executions by Special Forces (Depot Speciale Troepen, DST) under Captain Westerling in Sulawesi
- 25 March 1947: the failure of the Linggarjati Agreement after unilateral Dutch adjustments
- 21 July - 5 August 1947: Operation Product / *Agresi Militer Belanda 1*
- 9 December 1947: the Dutch 'cleansing operation' in Rawagede
- 17 January 1948: the signing of the Renville Agreement

- 18 - 30 September 1948: the Madiun uprising
- 19 December 1948 - 5 January 1949: Operation Kraai / *Agresi Militer Belanda 2*
- 1 March 1949: Indonesian assault on Yogyakarta
- 7 May 1949: the signing of the Rum-Van Roijen Agreement
- 7 August 1949: Darul Islam proclaims the Islamic State of Indonesia (completely crushed in 1962)
- 10 and 14 August 1949: truce in Java and Sumatra respectively
- 23 August - 2 November 1949: the Round Table Conference (RTC) in The Hague
- 27 December 1949: the transfer of sovereignty to the Republic of the United States of Indonesia (USI)
- 26 July 1950: the dissolution of the KNIL
- 17 August 1950: the establishment of the unitary state of Republik Indonesia; the dissolution of the USI
- Mid-1951: the return of the last Dutch KL and KNIL troops to the Netherlands
- August 1954 - 21 February 1956: Indonesia dissolves the Dutch-Indonesian Union
- 1962-1963: the transfer of New Guinea via the United Nations to Indonesia

What is evident from this chronology is both the constant intertwining of diplomatic and military battles and the succession of implemented or only partially implemented treaties. From the Hoge Veluwe conference via Linggarjati, Renville and Rum-Van Roijen to the Round Table Conference (RTC), the Dutch government gave the dual message that it was willing to take leave of its colony but, as noted above, only along the path mapped out by the Netherlands, which would also allow the interests of Dutch business to be firmly secured. It should have been obvious to the Dutch that the Republic could not possibly have accepted such a proposal.

In summary, the acknowledgement by the Dutch that Indonesia would soon become an independent state had already been included in the government declaration of 7 February 1946 and was subsequently confirmed at the (failed) Hoge Veluwe Conference (April 1946) and – in particular – the Linggarjati Agreement signed on 15 November 1946, in which the Republic was *de facto* recognized. However, the Netherlands sought to limit the dominant role of the Republic by two means, namely by pressing for a





*An enthusiastic crowd welcomes President Sukarno (1950). The slogans on the banners read 'Selamat datang, Merdeka!' (Welcome, Freedom!), 'Hapuskan! Negara djadjahan pasti rakjat [makmur]' (Down with the colony. [Then] the people will prosper), and 'Tentara dan rakjat bersatu-bulat. Kita menjadi kuat' ([When] army and people are united, we are strong).* Source: Photographer unknown, ANRI/IPPHOS.

federal state and by proposing a Union. Both objectives were achieved at the RTC, but the structures set up for this purpose did not last long. While the Netherlands interpreted sovereignty in a fundamentally limited way, the Republic continued to pursue unconditional self-determination. That the Republican negotiators at the RTC put their signatures to something less than this was a tactical compromise; after the transfer of sovereignty there would be more political leeway to take matters into their own hands. The Dutch side had always demanded more than could actually be asked of the Republic and had by no means always honoured their own concessions. Certainly the army command – and when push came to shove also the governments in The Hague and in Batavia – were willing to enforce this by military means. In this context, there are good arguments for considering 'the failure of the generations' to which Queen Juliana referred in the transfer of sovereignty to be primarily a *Dutch* failure.<sup>15</sup>

The RTC was also where the two sides came to an agreement on a financial settlement, which painfully illustrates just how much the Dutch side was thinking in terms of lost property and their own rights. Moreover, the Netherlands demanded that Indonesia pay a debt of 6.3 billion Dutch guilders, which also included an amount of some 2 billion guilders for the military costs incurred from 1945 to 1949. Hence the Indonesians were essentially billed for the Dutch attempt to reoccupy their archipelago. The Indonesian negotiators successfully refused to pay the latter, while they had already accepted the former in principle in 1946. The Netherlands – with Prime Minister Drees in the lead – felt very short-changed by this and only accepted the reduction under heavy American pressure. This Indonesian debt to the Netherlands was almost entirely repaid. By contrast, the Dutch government has to this day not paid the salaries and pensions of civil servants and soldiers in the service of the Dutch East Indies that went unpaid during the Japanese occupation, referring to the formally correct argument – but highly debatable from a moral and political perspective – that this obligation, if it existed at all, had been transferred from the colonial government to the Indonesian government.<sup>16</sup>

## THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The dominant Dutch view thus shifted from a rejection of Indonesian nationalism and of the Republic to a recognition of the inevitability of a transfer of sovereignty in the short term, but under Dutch auspices and only as a federal Indonesia that would remain tied to the Netherlands in a Union. The Dutch military build-up and the deployment of the armed forces were seen – and defended – in that light. After all, the restoration of their own position of power was necessary for the envisaged decolonization process, which meant that any Indonesian resistance to this Dutch policy stance had to be suppressed.

From the outset, however, the Netherlands was confronted with an internationalization of the conflict, which began in the British period. Thereafter the United States became a crucial but certainly not the only factor, alongside the United Nations where the Soviet Union, China and several former colonies also had a voice.

Time and again, the pattern of bilateral and multilateral pressure followed by Dutch concessions repeated itself. The Dutch government continued to try to present the war as an internal matter and to prevent the internationalization of the conflict. However, international interference could not be kept out of the equation and repeatedly compelled the Netherlands to make concessions. It was British pressure that led to the Linggarjati Agreement; American pressure and direct involvement that resulted in the Renville Agreement; and condemnations by the United Nations Security Council that put a stop to Operations Product and Kraai, allowed the restoration of the Republican government in Yogyakarta, and ultimately led to the Rum-Van Roijen Agreement, the ceasefire and the RTC, where the UN also had a seat at the table. On several occasions, the Dutch government agreed to international mediation, including under the auspices of the UN Security Council. Often, however, the outcome was disappointing from a Dutch perspective, which in turn gave rise to resentment of foreign interference – even though it became increasingly apparent that the war simply could not be won militarily.<sup>17</sup>

International interference in the Dutch-Indonesian war reflected changing geopolitical relations. The Cold War played an important role in this, including at the United Nations, for which the ‘Indonesian question’ was a litmus test. Even before the Second World War, the Soviet Union had taken an anti-colonial stance, and after the end of that war, colonialism and decolonization became a crucial issue in the Cold War. This led the United States

to adopt a policy that was supportive of decolonization, provided that the new states were not communist. One complication for the Americans in the Dutch-Indonesian conflict was that they did not want to alienate the Netherlands, given the precarious security situation in Europe. However, the suppression – by the Republic – of the communist Madiun uprising in September 1948 convinced Washington that the Republic could become a reliable partner. This left the Dutch government with little choice, especially since Washington threatened the Netherlands with a discontinuation of Marshall Aid.

Furthermore, the Indonesian struggle for independence took place in the context of the first phase of a global post-war decolonization process in which several countries in Asia and the Middle East became independent, in some cases following an armed struggle. The Republic of Indonesia was supported by new states such as India, which became independent in 1947. At the same time, the British and the French were themselves involved in decolonization processes in several places, including Southeast Asia, and this meant that they adopted difficult and sometimes inconsistent policies with regard to the Dutch-Indonesian conflict. Some Arab countries such as Egypt also recognized the Republic of Indonesia *de jure* even before 27 December 1949. Given the geopolitical situation and international law of that time, the colonial period only really ended for Indonesia with the formal transfer of sovereignty, even though many states granted the Republic *de facto* recognition.

The former colonies' struggle to achieve independence was in many cases an extremely bloody process – just as the end and aftermath of the Second World War had been in Europe. Many of the questions being asked about Dutch military conduct in Indonesia can therefore be discussed most meaningfully in a comparative perspective, and that has indeed been the approach in this book. It is, however, important to note that even from such a perspective, the Dutch-Indonesian war was anything but inevitable. Other countries demonstrated that this was possible. In the Philippines, for example, the Americans transferred sovereignty in 1946, as they had promised in 1936, albeit to a very pro-American elite. Great Britain peacefully transferred sovereignty to Burma in 1948. Even the independence of the former British colony of India in 1947 was the result of negotiations – the violence only came afterwards with the so-called Partition of India and Pakistan. In any case, military conflicts in the British colonies mainly took place after 1949.

The closest equivalent process in these first post-war years was the drama that played out in French Indochina (1946-1954); this explains why there was a certain degree of French-Dutch diplomatic solidarity in this period. However, the most violent phase of the French decolonization process – in and around Vietnam (1950-1954) and in Algeria (1954-1962) – had yet to begin at this point. This was also true of the colonial wars that dictatorial Portugal waged in Africa and which did not end until 1974.

In short, the Dutch-Indonesian decolonization process and war took place in a historical context that was new to all the parties involved. This insight may make the Dutch mindset and conduct at the time – which was ‘on the wrong side of history’ – more understandable. However, it certainly does not alter the fact that they were altogether unacceptable from an Indonesian perspective, even back then.



### 3.

# The war in Indonesia 1945-1949

## The military-historical context

GERT OOSTINDIE AND RÉMY LIMPACH

The main focus of this research programme is the nature of the Dutch military conduct in the Indonesian War of Independence. Much has already been published on this theme, at first mostly in the form of commemorative literature. Following the *Excessennota* [Memorandum on excesses] in 1969, a handful of academic books on violent ‘infringements’ (*ontsporingen*) was published, but only in the last decade have thorough analyses appeared.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on this historiography, this chapter opens with a brief analysis of the strategy, organization and actions of the Indonesian and British armed forces. We then consider the Dutch armed forces in more depth. This is followed by an outline of the course of the war and, finally, a discussion of the current state of the historiography. The latter anticipates the interim conclusions to this first part, in which we relate the choice of sub-projects back to our approach to the main research question.

*The Indonesian commander-in-chief, General Sudirman, greeting his men; Yogyakarta, 28 April 1946.* Source: Photographer unknown, ANRI/1PPHOS.

## THE INDONESIAN ARMED FORCES

The Republic was a state under construction, not only administratively but also militarily; whereas the British and – on paper, at least – the Dutch armed forces were tightly organized institutions, this could not be said of the majority of armed groups on the Indonesian side. On 17 August 1945, the day of the proclamation, no national army existed at all. Faced with the external threat of reoccupation, major internal divisions, and violent conflicts, however, the creation of a national army was a top priority for the Republican leaders. Sukarno took the first step on 22 August by founding the *Badan Keamanan Rakyat* (BKR, ‘People’s Security Agency’), a federation of existing armed groups that, for diplomatic reasons, was not yet described as an ‘army’. On 5 October, a more centralized army was founded, the *Tentara Keamanan Rakyat* (TKR, ‘People’s Security Army’). In early 1946, the TKR was reformed and renamed the *Tentara Republik Indonesia* (TRI, ‘Army of the Republic of Indonesia’); and in June 1947 it was reorganized once more as the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI, ‘Indonesian National Armed Forces’).

As far as personnel were concerned, though, the foundations of what would become the TNI were laid much earlier. Holding senior positions in that army were mainly servicemen who had been trained by the Japanese during the occupation, besides a few dozen Indonesians who had completed Dutch officer training before the war. During the Japanese period, Indonesians were recruited as auxiliaries under Japanese command, with the intention that they would join the fight against the Allies. It never came to that, as the Allied advance into South East Asia hardly touched Indonesia and Japan surrendered on 15 August 1945. By then, however, large numbers of Indonesians had received basic training and been assigned to various forces under Japanese control. Tens of thousands of Indonesians who had previously served in the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL) were enlisted in the Japanese army as *heiho* (auxiliary soldiers); in addition, hundreds of thousands of young Indonesians were trained militarily, more or less, by the Japanese occupying forces, including around 57,000 recruits for the Indonesian volunteer army, the *Pembela Tanah Air* (PETA, ‘Defenders of the Homeland’).

The groups formed by the Japanese would make an important contribution to the fight against two Allied powers, the British and the Dutch, but not in defence of Japan, but of Indonesian independence. The Japanese contribution to the military confrontation was not limited to the recruitment

and training activities prior to 15 August 1945, but was followed up by the large numbers of weapons that the Japanese handed over to the Indonesians in the last quarter of 1945, voluntarily or otherwise. A limited number – inflated in Dutch propaganda – of 3,000 Japanese soldiers joined the Indonesian struggle.<sup>2</sup> Japanese soldiers were also used as auxiliaries by the British, their former enemies, who initially faced a shortage of troops. In doing so, the Japanese undertook their own harsh reprisals in response to Indonesian attacks on their troops or civilians.

Two main lines can be identified in the army's development from the BKR, via the TKR and TRI, into the TNI; the first organizational, the second strategic and tactic. The successive reorganizations were intended to down-scale, rationalize and professionalize what was initially a massive army. First of all, this meant that the political and military leaders made every effort to transform what was originally a motley collection of military and paramilitary units formed on an ad hoc, bottom-up basis into a more tightly organized and uniform army with top-down leadership. Outside the Republican army, large numbers of more or less independent armed groups (*laskars*) were active; the aim was to disband some and incorporate and discipline others of these militias, which frequently clashed with the TNI. The total size of the armed forces was gradually reduced. In the reorganization in mid-1947 that would produce the TNI, an army of 350,000 servicemen had to be merged with 470,000 *laskars*. This operation, which entailed downsizing to create a well-trained, mobile army of – on paper – 160,000 men, did not happen without resistance and was one of the causes of the communist Madiun uprising in September 1948. By Dutch estimates, at the time of Operation Kraai/*Agresi Militer Belanda 2* the TNI had 100,000 men on Java and 40,000 on Sumatra; the separate militias also had around 150,000 combatants. In addition to this, Islamic armed groups such as Hizbullah and Sabilillah were operating, some under the banner of Darul Islam, which had several tens of thousands of members.

At the same time, the Republican army leadership thus sought to improve the training, discipline and arming of the troops. Regarding weaponry, the cliché of *pemuda* armed with bamboo spears (*bambu runcing*) needs rectification. In the first months after the surrender, the army took firearms from pre-war KNIL depots on Java; unlike on Sumatra, the Japanese army did not intervene. Furthermore, much modern weaponry was captured from – and, less frequently, voluntarily handed over by – the initially passive Japanese army, which had withdrawn to its barracks. This included large quantities of

heavy weapons such as tanks and artillery. The latter, however, were mostly lost as early as 1945-1946, mainly in the war against the British. In the course of the war, new weapons were acquired through 'smuggling' (as the Dutch viewed it) with Singapore and the Philippines, which the Republic paid for with quantities of opium, among other things. Indonesia also established its own weapons industry and munitions production.

The Republic's efforts could not alter the fact that throughout the war, the armaments and equipment of the Dutch armed forces, though hardly optimal, were far superior both quantitatively and qualitatively. Prior to the reorganization of 1947, it is estimated that only a quarter of all regular Indonesian soldiers had firearms. In late 1948, according to Dutch estimates, 40-50 per cent of TNI soldiers on Java and 25 per cent on Sumatra were equipped with firearms; the percentage was sometimes lower among semi-autonomous armed groups. The Republican armed forces had a limited arsenal of heavy weapons, mainly artillery guns and mortars, but they also had access to large numbers of aerial bombs, mainly deployed as pull bombs, which could also be seen as heavy weapons. The air force, *Angkatan Udara*, and the navy, *Angkatan Laut*, were both small in size.

Professionalization involved creating a more efficient organization. On 12 November 1945, the army commanders from Java and Sumatra chose former PETA officer Sudirman, just 29 years old, as commander-in-chief (*Panglima Besar*). He was selected against the wishes of the political leaders, who preferred Urip Sumoharjo, a former KNIL officer. Sudirman, who was suffering from tuberculosis and would have to be carried countless kilometres on a stretcher in 1949 to evade capture by the Dutch, would become a symbol of Indonesian indomitability. His chief of staff was initially Sumoharjo, followed by a former KNIL reserve officer candidate, Abdul Haris Nasution. Although the majority of TNI commanders had previously been PETA officers, among the most senior military leaders, who generally had little experience, a group of around 60 former KNIL (prospective) officers was overrepresented. Officers with a KNIL background included TNI leaders such as Tahi Bonar Simatupang and Alex Kawilarang, who had trained at the Royal Military Academy (Koninklijke Militaire Academie, KMA) in Bandung. Although there were internal tensions between these two founding groups, these were overcome when it came to facing a common enemy, the Dutch.

In 1947, the TNI had ten divisions on Java and six on Sumatra. In mid-1948, the number of divisions on Java was reduced to four as part of the

reorganization: Division I Brawidjaja (East Java), Division II Diponegoro (Central Java East), Division III Susan Gunungjati (Central Java West) and Division IV Siliwangi (West Java and Bantam). In addition, the TNI had two independent brigades on Java: Brigade XVI (Seberang) and XVII (Peladjar). As well as a staff, the divisions had auxiliary weapons and services such as artillery and heavy machine guns, liaison units, medical personnel, carriers and military police. The most famous division was the Siliwangi division, a relatively well-armed crack regiment. The Republican headquarters consisted of two commandos, one on Java and one on Sumatra, under Nasution and Suhardjo Hardjowardojo, respectively; the latter was succeeded in late 1948 by Hidajat Martaatmadja, formerly of the KNIL.

The second main line was the development of a military strategy and tactical doctrine. The objective remained unchanged: unconditional independence and the expulsion of the Dutch armed forces, by military means if negotiations failed to achieve adequate results. At first, the Indonesian army largely used conventional tactics and frontal attacks, such as in the Battle of Surabaya (November 1945) and during the fighting in Semarang (August 1946) and elsewhere. It soon became clear that the British and Dutch troops were much better equipped for open confrontations such as these, which resulted in very large losses on the Indonesian side.<sup>3</sup> The army commander therefore gradually switched to a guerrilla approach. During both 'police actions', he decided to withdraw all soldiers to limit losses and then regroup in areas beyond the Dutch army's reach, from which a guerrilla war was waged. Although the TNI focused on guerrilla warfare from mid-1947, it still carried out regular conventional attacks on Dutch positions and Dutch-occupied towns, too, such as on Yogyakarta (under Colonel Suharto, 1 March 1949) and Solo (7-10 August 1949). These were symbolic operations that were important for Republican morale and also gave a crucial political signal. Despite resulting in large Republican losses, they showed the outside world and their own people that the TNI and the Republic were anything but beaten, and undermined the Dutch claim that everything was under control.

As mentioned above, the switch to guerrilla warfare in 1947 was primarily motivated by the large losses in open confrontations, in which the TNI was invariably the losing party. The training of Nasution, Kawilarang and Simatupang at the KMA proved useful in this tactical shift. The TNI's sources of inspiration stretched further, however, from the British action behind Japanese lines in Burma to the Long March by the Chinese Red Army, as well

as the ideas of the Indonesian communist activist Tan Malaka. The most important source of inspiration, though, was the classic text *On War* by military theorist Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), especially his discussion of the 'people's war'. In line with the chosen mode of combat, the TNI maintained the regular army structure but also organized so-called *Wehrkreise*. These were military districts lying in areas occupied by the Dutch, where well-armed mobile units carried out as many small attacks and sabotage actions as possible, whilst more static troops – and civilians – undertook defensive and support tasks. Local residents – coerced if necessary – also played an important role in providing armed groups with food, recruits, intelligence, medical care and shelter. In this 'total people's war' – a concept proposed by Nasution in mid-1947 and adopted by Sjahrir's cabinet – the administration, armed forces and residents worked together under military leadership to carry out an intricate 'people's defence'. At the *desa* and village level, this was led by the *lurah*, the village chief. Village chiefs, other officials and civilians who sided with the Dutch or worked for the Dutch authorities were viewed as legitimate targets of intimidation and violence; indeed, thousands of 'collaborators' were killed. As the Dutch armed forces and administrators associated with the Dutch regime also demanded loyalty, the people – and certainly the *lurah* – were caught precariously between two lines of fire.

The TNI, broadly supported by the population, was increasingly able to wage an effective guerrilla war; the Dutch armed forces were unable to come up with an appropriate response. It is usually the case in such wars that the conventional occupying army is unable to suppress the guerrilla fighters, whilst the latter are unable to defeat the opponent in direct combat, but have greater endurance in a battle that is exhausting for both sides. For the Netherlands, the human and financial cost of the armed deployment became increasingly problematic. The determination, stamina, resilience and resourcefulness of the Indonesian side, as well as their demographic and material reserves, were great and remained so even when the Dutch ramped up their use of force.

The TNI did not gain a military monopoly on the Indonesian side, however. While the Republican army waged war with the Netherlands, it also had to fight religiously and politically motivated regional conflicts with Indonesian armed groups, such as local *laskars* in Karawang in 1947-1948. The armed groups affiliated with *Darul Islam* sought confrontation with the Republic as well as the Netherlands. On 7 August 1949, just as a Republican

victory came into sight, Darul Islam, led by Kartosuwirjo, proclaimed the Islamic State of Indonesia in West Java. This precipitated a bloody struggle between the TNI and Darul Islam, which would not be settled definitively in the Republican army's favour until 1962. Furthermore, in late 1948 communist soldiers within the TNI in Madiun and elsewhere rebelled against the reorganizations and their imminent marginalization. In the many months of fighting with nationalist TNI units, which would ultimately prevail, at least 8,000 people were killed. Their leaders, in particular, were later executed by TNI forces loyal to Yogyakarta.

During the war, as explained above, local militias but also criminal gangs were active throughout the country, sometimes in alliance with politically motivated armed organizations. These groups contributed substantially to the extreme violence on the Indonesian side, beginning with *bersiap*. The fact that the Republican army failed to achieve an effective monopoly on force weakened the political position of the Republic versus the Netherlands, and did little for its international reputation. On the other hand, the Republican political and military leadership could blame the atrocities and demarcation-line violations on the militias, even when these were carried out by the TNI.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there were tensions between the army and the political leaders of the Republic, who made more concessions in the negotiations with the Dutch than the army leadership considered acceptable. These tensions did not provoke a rift between the Republican political leaders and the TNI, however. In a general sense, it can be said that whilst internal divisions partly determined the course of the struggle, the great majority of political movements and warring parties were striving for independence and were therefore extremely suspicious, if not downright dismissive, of an Allied occupation and certainly a Dutch return. This anti-colonial attitude was and continued to be the main unifying element on the Republican side.

## THE BRITISH (AND AUSTRALIAN) ARMED FORCES

On 15 August 1945, the Allied high command decided to expand the area of the British South East Asia Command (SEAC) under Admiral Louis Mountbatten, which was already responsible for Allied operations in South East Asia, including Sumatra, to the entire Indonesian archipelago. SEAC's most important tasks were maintaining law and order, and disarming and repatri-

ating the 300,000-strong Japanese force, as well as evacuating 35,000 prisoners of war and around 80,000 civilians from Japanese internment camps. On Java, most of these civilians were Dutch; in the rest of Indonesia, they were also Indo-European. The first British (predominantly British Indian) troops arrived on Java on 29 September 1945, six weeks after the declaration of independence. The British force increased to a total of around 60,000 soldiers, mainly stationed on Java (45,000) and Sumatra (15,000). The last British troops left over a year later, in late November 1946.

Their apparently limited mission proved complex, because having assumed the (provisional) restoration of colonial order, upon arrival the British troops found themselves in a nascent Indonesian state. Facing two opposing claims to sovereignty, the British armed forces attempted in vain to navigate between them, alienating all parties and becoming embroiled in a colonial war in the process. The Republic distrusted the British as the potential harbingers of a Dutch reoccupation; the Dutch colonial authorities believed that the British were overly passive, thus frustrating their legitimate return and undermining Dutch authority. The British, who had different priorities and limited resources in the wake of a devastating world war, tried to minimize their role as a party to – and maximize their role as a mediator in – an incipient grim colonial war. Ideally, they wanted to leave Indonesia as soon as possible.

The British approach was necessarily limited to establishing control in seven key urban areas on Java and Sumatra that were essential for carrying out the demobilization and evacuation. Elsewhere, the authority of the Republic was left untouched. The British presence and offensive operations nevertheless sparked protests and armed actions by the Indonesians against what the latter viewed as a colonial reoccupation. These were initially small-scale attacks, but in October and November 1945 the resistance culminated in the Battle of Surabaya, which would ultimately become the largest conventional confrontation of the entire war. It is estimated that 16,000 Indonesians were killed in the urban fighting, compared to 400 British servicemen.

Although the research programme did not focus on the actions of the British army in these months, it is important to note that this episode foreshadowed the military action to follow, especially the great asymmetry in the number of victims. This partly stemmed from what was initially the badly organized mode of combat on the Indonesian side, and partly from the harshness of the British approach. Often in response to Indonesian force, on several occasions the British used extremely violent reprisal measures, such

as reducing villages to ashes; their 'methods' also included the systematic torture of prisoners. The later Dutch army commander S.H. (Simon) Spoor, then head of the NEFIS intelligence service, made an extremely negative assessment of the British use of extreme force – ironically, in view of the heavy-handed Dutch actions in later years.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the British on Java and Sumatra, around 50,000 mostly Australian troops were stationed in Kalimantan and the 'Great East', all of the islands between Java and New Guinea, until February 1946. There was only limited armed resistance in the areas that they took over from the Japanese or had captured during the Second World War. This would soon change, particularly in South Sulawesi and on Bali in the course of 1946, but by then the Dutch armed forces had partly taken over these parts of the archipelago from the British, Australian and Japanese troops.

### THE DUTCH ARMED FORCES: STRATEGY

The Dutch armed forces waged a continuous war for many years, not just two 'police actions'; historians are now virtually unanimous on this point. The original mission prior to 15 August 1945 was to fight the Japanese occupying forces; the mission then became to bring 'order and peace' through the restoration of Dutch authority, later presented as the creation of an essential transitional phase in the establishment of a federal Indonesian state that would be bound with the Netherlands in a Union. The Dutch military approach focused on eliminating the Republican armed forces. Due to the guerrilla war, however, it proved extremely difficult to distinguish between civilians and the TNI – only partly in uniform – and other armed groups. Despite the negotiations and successive cease-fires, the military conflict continued almost unabated, because both the Dutch and the Republican army leaders felt only partly bound to the agreements, in view of the alleged demarcation-line violations and the unreliability of the opponent. What is more, military hawks and their supporters on both sides preferred to play the military card.

The military strategy developed under Spoor initially focused on a gradual expansion of the urban enclaves inherited from the British to strategically and/or economically important areas. Spoor subsequently embarked on his 'spearhead strategy', a 'shock and awe' strategy from the KNIL playbook: the use of overwhelming operations and much show of force to push through to centres of enemy resistance and eliminate military leaders, after which the anti-Dutch resistance was expected to collapse like a house of cards. It

was in this spirit that the first major military offensive, Operation Product/*Agresi Militer 1*, was launched in mid-1947. It appeared to be a great success. The large mobile columns, supported by superior heavy weaponry, warships and the air force, met with relatively little resistance. Within two weeks, the Dutch had managed to expand their territory enormously, partly because most Republican troops retreated to inaccessible areas in order to evade encirclement and destruction.

The downside of this success rapidly became clear. The supply lines to the population centres occupied by the Dutch and the hundreds of outposts became longer and more vulnerable. The Republican armed forces focused their hit-and-run operations on this Achilles heel in particular. Moreover, the Dutch failed to establish a stable regime in the captured territories. They did not generally get further than establishing superficial area control. Military resources fell far short: a battalion consisting of 800 men, only half of whom were operational on average, was responsible for 1,600 square kilometres, an area slightly larger than the province of Utrecht and almost twice the size of today's province of Yogyakarta. Nevertheless, in a similar way – again without detailed military and administrative plans for effective and lasting area control – another large offensive, Operation Kraai/*Agresi Militer Belanda 2*, was launched in late 1948. In order to limit the expected international condemnation of this offensive and achieve a *fait accompli*, the Netherlands deliberately chose the United Nation's Christmas recess. This time Spoor, in an attempt to wipe what he considered the recalcitrant Republic off the map, was allowed to carry out his fervently desired 'push-through' to the Republican seat of government, Yogyakarta. The political leaders were captured, the military leaders escaped. Once more, the campaign appeared to have been a great military success. But once the smoke of battle had cleared, it turned out that the operational problems had only multiplied. That was hardly surprising, because the size of the occupied territory – the whole of Java and key parts of Sumatra – had become even larger, and with it the overstretch of the armed forces and the administration. Moreover, the international community was definite in its condemnation of what was seen as aggressive Dutch action.

The Dutch army leadership had – once again – seriously miscalculated these problems. Spoor and his most important deputy commanders, almost all of whom were KNIL officers, had underestimated the Indonesian opponent. Their optimism was based on the successes against the TNI in 1945–1946, as well as the low opinion that KNIL commanders traditionally had of

Indonesian combat capability. Nevertheless, in mid-1947, in the wake of the first military offensive, attempts were made to adjust the mode of combat to Indonesian guerrilla warfare, in the direction of a counter-guerrilla warfare in which the Dutch army would mainly operate in smaller mobile units. The aim, following the proven KNIL approach, was to enforce 'pacification' with intensive patrols, large and small 'purges' and the 'ceaseless pursuit' of Indonesian armed groups with the intention of eliminating them. This would be followed by the development of the civilian administration, in which achieving or forcing the support and allegiance of local residents would play a central role.

In this 'pacification phase', the traditionally influential village chiefs who gave their support to Dutch units could count on (modest) rewards in the form of money, clothing, promotion or better housing. In order to placate them and the villagers, the Dutch troops provided regular humanitarian and medical assistance in particular, and they also helped to rebuild damaged infrastructure. Dutch political and military leaders continued to base all of this on an outdated, paternalistic colonial worldview, in which the population would naturally be on the Dutch side once Republican 'pockets of resistance' had finally been eliminated. Due to this colonial illusion, they considered it unnecessary to develop an integrated policy to win over the Indonesian people. It should be noted that the very limited nature of Dutch administrative and financial resources played a role in this, too, meaning that aid remained fragmented and limited in scope. All in all, the Dutch authorities took a 'carrot and stick' approach in which the 'stick' wielded by the armed forces – in line with the traditionally heavy-handed operations of the KNIL – prevailed. The repression consisted of a range of collective and sometimes bloody punishments of local people who were considered hostile or insufficiently cooperative. This included executions without trial, assault, mass arrests, the torching of villages and the destruction of provisions, to set a deterrent example.<sup>5</sup>

After the first Dutch offensive, reality thus proved to be many times more complex than Spoor and his staff's optimistic assessments suggested. Dutch military predominance was reduced by improvements in the organization and arming of the tactically more flexible TNI, which took the initiative. Moreover, the area occupied by the Dutch – which, with its many mountains, forests and swamps, was perfect for guerrilla warfare – was simply too large and inaccessible to be controlled effectively. As not all Republican servicemen were in uniform, as mentioned above, it was virtually impossible to

distinguish fighters from civilians. Moreover, the Dutch troops had inadequate intelligence, whereas the Republic had set up an efficient alarm system, so that most Dutch operations came to nothing.<sup>6</sup> All of this gradually increased the vulnerability of the Dutch position, however healthy the situation on the map might have seemed after the first offensive and after Operation Kraai/*Agresi Militer Belanda 2*. They were pyrrhic victories: Dutch area control was usually superficial and limited to population centres and vulnerable supply lines, whilst the TNI controlled the edges of the terrain and had great freedom of movement, particularly at night.

Dutch military leaders issued deceptively phrased, rose-tinted reports on the difficult military situation, which was leading to rising losses and mounting exhaustion, particularly in the first quarter of 1949. As mentioned above, from the very outset of the war in 1945, the army leadership had underestimated the strength of nationalism, the Republic and the TNI, although opinions diverged on numbers of troops and the amount of time that would be needed to bring the entire archipelago back under Dutch rule. In November 1945, the commander of all armed forces in the Dutch East Indies, Lieutenant Admiral Conrad Helfrich, and the commander of the KNIL, Lieutenant General Ludolph Hendrik van Oyen, thought 75,000 men would be needed for the reoccupation of Java and Sumatra. Major General Wybrandus Schilling (KNIL) initially made the same assessment for what he described as the 'war of reconquest' ('not yet counting Bantam and Aceh'). Only shortly later, however, he was already talking about 200,000 men for a period of five to even ten years; with hindsight a more realistic estimate, for which Helfrich and Van Oyen did not thank him.<sup>7</sup>

On 1 February 1946, against the advice of Van Mook, the Schermerhorn cabinet eventually appointed not Schilling but the younger and less experienced Spoor as army commander general to succeed Van Oyen. Spoor retained this position until his unexpected death after a heart attack on 25 May 1949. Throughout that time, he repeatedly shared his optimistic assessments of the 'reoccupation', provided he was granted a sufficient mandate and resources. His stance betrayed an enormous underestimation of both the support for Indonesian nationalism and the opponent's military capacities; he once characterized the Republican army leaders as 'inept amateurs [who] had to be taught the military trade'.<sup>8</sup> The adjutant chief of staff of the TNI, Colonel Simatupang, later wrote caustically about the systematic underestimation on the Dutch side:

From conversations with the Dutch before the attack [Operation Kraai/*Agresi Militer Belanda 2*], I had gained the impression that they – and their soldiers in particular – had no idea of the nature of the forces they would face. [...] These Dutch soldiers, with their conventional training, had often served too long in the Dutch East Indies, with the result that they viewed everything through the lens of the past.<sup>9</sup>

The army leadership was formally under the supreme authority of the Dutch colonial government – Van Mook, then Beel – and ultimately the Dutch cabinet. Spoor, however, has gone down in history as a ‘political general’. Without any doubt, he played a key role throughout the entire war, until his sudden death in late May 1949. He maintained intensive contact with the Dutch administration and business community, understood the importance of the media in the struggle with the Republic, and was personally in charge of almost all military affairs, including scandals that could have political repercussions. Spoor’s advice weighed very heavily in The Hague, of course; he was better informed than any politician about the military dimension of the conflict.

Spoor saw little advantage in negotiations, and the way he and the NEFIS intelligence service shared information with the Dutch government was downright manipulative. Republican ‘demarcation-line violations’ were constantly emphasized, for example, whilst there was silence on Dutch violations. In so doing, Spoor tried to portray the Republican negotiators as unreliable and gain greater scope from the Dutch government for the advance to Yogyakarta, among other things, in order to inflict a decisive defeat on the Republic. To his great frustration, he was only given permission for this attack with Operation Kraai, in December 1948. Spoor and NEFIS also kept harping on about the communist threat, partly in order to garner international support for military action.<sup>10</sup> Van Mook, the official commander-in-chief, would frequently (but ineffectively) complain to Spoor about the latter’s communication with the Dutch government behind his back, and about military operations that were often undertaken without his knowledge.

Van Mook also repeatedly expressed his displeasure at Spoor’s patchy reporting of (potential) misconduct by the armed forces. The picture that emerges from the historiography is one in which Spoor and his adjutant commanders covered up excessive violence by Dutch troops as much as possible, just as Van Mook himself did. But the concealment was often after

the event: the governor general and even the army commander general were frequently surprised by news of unauthorized offensive actions and extreme acts of violence by their own units.

### THE DUTCH ARMED FORCES: SIZE AND RESOURCES

The first troops arrived in Jakarta from the Netherlands in late February 1946, after the British had withdrawn their above-mentioned landing ban, which had been issued in November 1945 in order to get the Dutch to the negotiating table. During the war, a total of some 220,000 soldiers from the Dutch armed forces served in Indonesia; partly in combat roles and partly in support and administrative roles.<sup>11</sup> At the peak in 1949, 150,000 soldiers were in service (chart 1). By far the majority of them were stationed in the core area of the Republic, hence Java, followed at some distance by Sumatra.

A total of 120,000 soldiers served in the Royal Netherlands Army (Koninklijke Landmacht, KL), previously only deployed in Europe. It should be noted, though, that the two armies – the KL and the KNIL – did not operate separately from one another. In the third quarter of 1946, there were two light divisions (A and B), each with three brigades and divisional troops; each of these brigades consisted of KL units and separate KNIL battalions, and were led by a KNIL field officer familiar with ‘East Indian conditions and tactics’. This remained the case in practice; only the C Division (until mid-1948) and the Marine Brigade, founded in 1943, differed in this respect. From September 1946, the first KL division predominantly made up of conscripts (1925 batch) was dispatched: the C Division, also known as the First Division ‘7 December’. Between March and June 1947, this was followed by the Second Division ‘Palmboom’ (D division, 1926 batch). The E Division (1927 batch) was dispatched between November 1948 and February 1949 and almost immediately split into smaller units, as these were better suited to counter-guerrilla warfare.<sup>12</sup>

The KL was almost entirely manned by Dutch soldiers; namely, several thousand professional military, 25,000 to 30,000 war volunteers (*oorlogs-vrijwilligers*, OVWs) – who were originally recruited for the war against Japan – and 95,000 to 100,000 conscripts. There was also a small women’s volunteer auxiliary corps (Vrijwillig Vrouwen Hulpkorps, VHK). Because the KNIL officers dominated the army leadership, the staffs, the intelligence services, the special forces, information provision, training and the logistics

chain, and emphatically wanted to remain in charge, this colonial army left a strong mark on the KL, which as a result mainly functioned as a supplier of men and heavy weaponry.

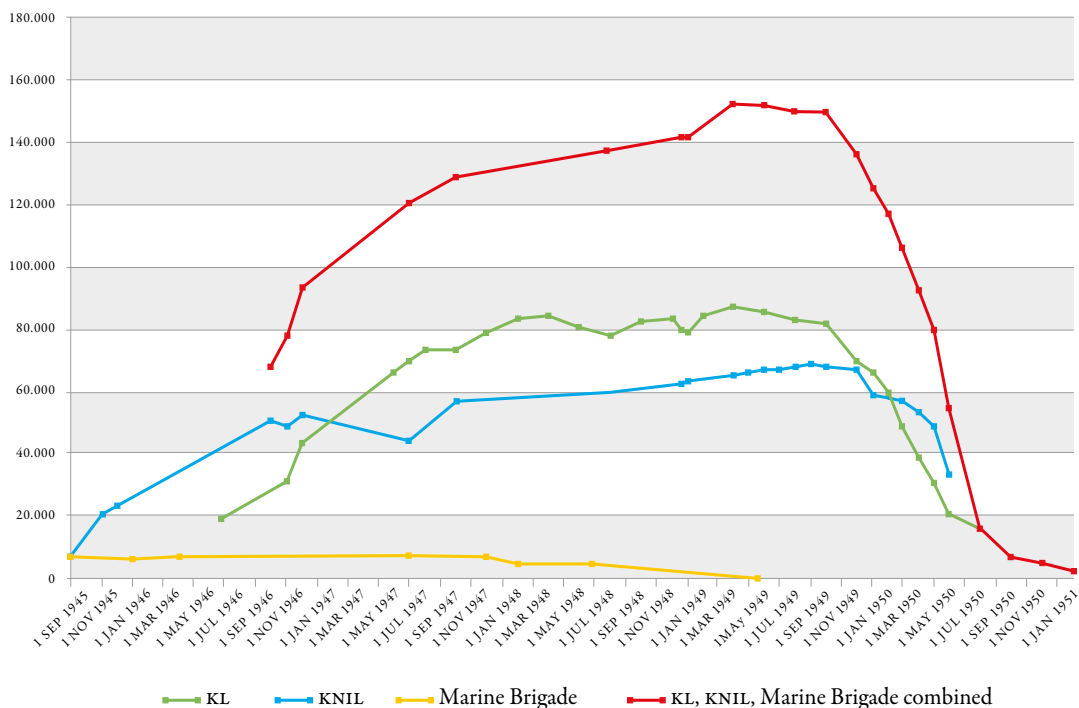
A total of 75,000 to 80,000 soldiers served in the KNIL between 1945 and 1950. The lower ranks were mainly made up of Indonesians (60,000), reflecting a colonial society divided along strict ethnic lines. The overwhelming number of soldiers came from Java, Madura, the Moluccas and the Minahasa. Owing to their alleged 'martial qualities' and unusually high level of loyalty, the largely Christian 'Ambonese' (from the Moluccas, but also the Minahasa) were overrepresented, but did not form a majority. A small number of Chinese also served in the KNIL. On average, 30-35 per cent of the KNIL consisted of European and Indo-European soldiers, but this proportion fell; in late 1949, it was less than a quarter. Around 500 war volunteers from Suriname and the Antilles also served in the KNIL, and 1,000 women served in the women's KNIL corps (Vrouwenkorps KNIL), founded in Australia in 1944.

The rebuilding of the colonial army began immediately after the Japanese surrender. During the Japanese occupation, some 30,000 European, Indo-European and 'Ambonese' KNIL servicemen had been interned under extremely harsh conditions. In late 1945, around 10,000 of these former prisoners of war were called back to arms. Initially most KNIL military, then only a few companies, were deployed on Java, but in late 1945 the British also gave permission for the stationing of KNIL units in the Riau archipelago, Kalimantan and the Great East, especially Sulawesi, and, in March 1946, on Bali. Only seven of the 23 KNIL battalions were ultimately stationed on Java or Sumatra.

In March 1946, the newly appointed army commander Spoor reorganized the KNIL and gave it a leading role. Spoor himself was a professional officer in the KNIL, as was his chief of staff, Dick Buurman van Vreeden, and almost all key officials in the General Staff, the other staffs in Jakarta, and the brigade and division staffs. The forced resignation in September 1948 of division commander Major General Henri Dürst Britt, a KL 'outsider' who was made a scapegoat by Spoor for the 'pacification problems' on West Java, and his replacement by Major General Edu Engles (KNIL), is illustrative of the dominance of the KNIL vision and mentality in the army leadership.

Unlike the soldiers brought in from the Netherlands, most KNIL servicemen were familiar with Indonesia; on the other hand, many had been

## Strength of the KL, KNIL and Marine Brigade, 1945-1950



*This diagram is based on archival research in military sources dating from the period 1945-1951. Where necessary, it has been supplemented with literature research (especially in relation to the Navy). Due to the nature of the conflict in the early years of 1945 and 1946, there is less clarity about the numbers of KL and KNIL soldiers who were mobilized at that time. According to the archive material itself, the figures up to May 1946 are considered 'unreliable'. After that, they are 'less reliable', and they are only considered 'reliable' from 1 October 1948 (diagram based on Groen et al, Krijgsgeweld en kolonie, p. 364).*

physically and mentally tested during the Japanese occupation and were strongly opposed to Indonesian nationalism. From a British perspective, KNIL military from all ranks had behaved in a provocative, trigger-happy and vindictive fashion on Java, behaviour that had contributed to the landing ban.<sup>13</sup> The record of the KNIL Infantry Battalion XV, deployed on South Sulawesi in early 1946, also reports that this unit behaved in an undisciplined and uncontrolled way, rapidly became violent, harboured

feelings of revenge against Indonesians, and showed little regard for Australian authority.

Spoor wanted to professionalize the KL and the KNIL, and complained about the shortage of officers. As late as 1948, an investigation showed that a majority of the officers, who had of necessity been promoted too rapidly, did not meet the minimum requirements of their rank. This far from benefitted the quality of the leadership, of course, something that was particularly disadvantageous in guerrilla warfare and probably did little to curb the extreme violence. Because the force was divided into small units and spread over a large number of often isolated outposts, low-ranking and young officers bore a high level of responsibility that was incommensurate with their experience.

In June 1946, the Special Forces known as the Depot Speciale Troepen (DST) were founded as part of the KNIL, later renamed the Korps Speciale Troepen (KST); these were elite commando units, the 'Green Berets' under the command of Captain Raymond Westerling. As a general mobile reserve unit, the Special Forces were supposed to support the infantry when the latter faced setbacks. The total size of the DST/KST, who were notorious for their repeated and systematic use of extreme violence, never exceeded 1,250 men. They included a large number of Indonesians, especially 'Ambonese'.

The KNIL had its own artillery, armoured personnel carriers and tanks, as well as military police (MP). The KNIL also had an air force, the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army Air Force (ML-KNIL), in which around 2,000 servicemen served in 1945, and almost 8,000 in 1949. In late 1947, the ML-KNIL had 333 aircraft, only a part of which operational. Its main tasks were to provide air support for the infantry and artillery, transport, reconnaissance and supply. They had little to fear from the small Republican air force. The ML-KNIL made an important contribution to Operation Product/*Agresi Militer Belanda 1* (1,039 combat flights) and Operation Kraai/*Agresi Militer Belanda 2* (2,412 combat flights), but most sorties took place between the two 'actions' and after the second. Like tanks and other heavy weapons, the air force also contributed to psychological warfare with displays of force and intimidation, including at military parades. The Dutch authorities, often ridden with orientalist notions, believed that 'the Oriental' in particular felt 'holy awe' for these modern weapons. But it did not stop there; there are several known cases of the ML-KNIL firing on civilian targets, such as marketplaces, *kampongs* and means of transport (on land and at sea), which

were subsequently condemned – in private – by Van Mook and Spoor, but not punished.

Spoor also deployed Indonesian auxiliary troops as part of the area control and counter-guerrilla effort, including static security guards and Chinese urban vigilantes (Pao An Tui), but also Indonesian soldiers and militias who had defected, some with criminal backgrounds, including Her Majesty's Irregular Troops (Harer Majesteits Ongeregelde Troepen, HAMOTs) and the special troops known as Speciale Troepen Groep Spier. In late 1947, the KNIL began to recruit and train 15,000 men for the so-called Security Battalions. These were entirely made up of Indonesian troops for the federal states founded with Dutch help. The police force was expanded to 35,000 men, and the number of security guards increased to 18,000 men in 1948 and 30,000 in 1949. The fighting power and loyalty of all these paramilitary organizations proved disappointing, however, from a Dutch perspective. There is an obvious parallel with the rapid and ignominious defeat of the KNIL by Japan in 1942. Then, too, Dutch army leaders had assumed that all Indonesian troops would risk their lives for the colonial cause. That had proved an illusion; numerous Indonesian KNIL soldiers had refused to fight in the battles with Japanese troops.

The Royal Navy (c. 20,000 men) consisted of a relatively large number of professional servicemen (3,000), as well as 7,000 war volunteers, 5,000 conscripts and 5,000 locally recruited Indonesians. The Royal Navy also had a women's unit, the Marine Vrouwenafdeling (MARVA, 470 women). The Marine Brigade, an elite unit that operationally fell directly under Spoor, was assigned to the A Division and served in East Java. To the great annoyance of the army and navy leadership, the brigade was slimmed down as a result of governmental cuts in 1948, and disbanded in mid-1949. The fleet was mainly deployed to prevent the Republican transport of fighters and goods by means of patrols and a blockade. This task was complicated by the limited size of the fleet and the enormous length of the coastline. The navy nevertheless succeeded in seriously hindering the Republican transport of weapons and troops; in doing so, it also failed the population by halting the supply of food and medicines, among other things. It was led by Vice Admiral Albert Pinke, a colonial hardliner, as shown by statements such as 'the sea is ours' and his intention to 'strangle' the Republic at sea.<sup>14</sup>

It was often noted, certainly by Dutch veterans, that the troops' armaments, clothing, food and medical care were sub-standard. This seems to have been a correct observation for the early years, as shown by the appeals

and complaints from soldiers of all ranks. Many weapons and other surplus equipment from the Second World War were in poor condition. Until the very end, there were complaints about equipment shortages, including munitions. Despite this, the weaponry of the Dutch armed forces was and continued to be quantitatively and qualitatively superior to that of their Indonesian opponents. On the other hand, building up the armed forces put a large burden on the limited financial resources of the Netherlands, which was destitute after 1940-1945. This was one of the driving forces behind 'Operation Product': to restore the profitable colonial economy.

Another frequently voiced complaint concerned the inadequate preparation of the Dutch recruits for the complex guerrilla battle in the archipelago – again a factor that may have had the effect of promoting violence. The first batch of war volunteers, who had undergone hardly any selection, struggled with a lack of training, information and discipline. The army leadership was very aware of this problem. The training that was intended to remedy this, later extended to conscripts, was mostly given in the Netherlands and on the ship to Indonesia, mainly by older KNIL instructors and 'tropics advisors' attached to KL units. This 'East Indies training' remained limited. The troops were deployed almost immediately upon arrival, at the expense of further training. Some of the training was military-technical, some was cultural and political. The second part was of little consequence, however, and much of what was taught to servicemen came down to an underestimation of the widely supported nationalism and the Indonesian opponents, who were reduced to 'extremists', '*rampokkers*' (raiders) and 'gangs'; precisely as the army leadership saw it.

The recruits were taught that their mission was to bring 'order and peace' to people who would overwhelmingly be on the Dutch side. The military doctrine was based on the pre-war conditions and more or less summarized in the *Voorschrift voor de Uitoefening van de Politiek-politionele Taak van het Leger* (Regulations on the army's political and policing duties, *VP TL*, 1924), which was based on the experiences in the final phase of the Aceh War (1873-1914). The basic principle of the task description was to reach a situation in which the civilian administration functioned efficiently and the vast majority of the population did not oppose colonial rule. According to this pre-war doctrine, it was always possible that local 'insurgents' might provoke an uprising; in that case, demonstrative crackdowns were the tried and tested method for rapid suppression. The *VP TL* was saturated with a colonial, orientalist mind-set that admittedly did preach respect for local cul-

tures, but simultaneously referred to 'Eastern fanaticism' and devious fighting methods. There were also warnings against taking unnecessarily harsh action so as to avoid alienating the population from the colonial regime, but in practice these admonitions tended to be ignored. Display of power and extreme violence had been characteristic of the KNIL's colonial wars since the early nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

As the army leadership stubbornly stuck to its risky strategy between 1945 and 1949, the instructions given to lower ranks changed little. Only minor amendments were made to the new edition of the *VPTL* published after 1945, although these regulations in no way provided for crushing a broadly-supported nationalist revolution in almost the entire Indonesian archipelago. In this sense, Spoor's 'spearhead strategy' – a modern variant of the traditional KNIL strategy of overawing the enemy (*'imponeerstrategie'*) by advancing with mobile columns to key 'hotbeds of resistance' or population centres and thereby 'decapitating' the resistance in one go – was also more consistent with pre-war doctrines and practices than the new reality. Moreover, on this point – unlike with regard to weaponry – the Dutch armed forces were at a disadvantage: their knowledge and understanding of the local situation and relations were invariably inadequate.

The equipment and the prevailing strategic and tactical concepts were not the only factors behind the use of extreme violence, however. In addition, the strength of the armed forces was largely determined by the 'mental component': military leadership, military ethics and military experience and tradition. To what extent was the 'mental strength' of the Dutch armed forces in 1945 adequate for the new conflict overseas? There are many indications that the armed forces – the KNIL, the KL and the Royal Navy – were inadequately prepared. The KNIL had lost many (senior) officers and had mainly specialized in policing tasks prior to the war, not large-scale, integrated military operations on land, at sea and in the air. The Marine Brigade was trained for deployment in large-scale regular operations, and the war had stripped the units of the Royal Netherlands Army of sufficiently well-trained and experienced officers and NCOs. As mentioned above, the first batch of war volunteers in particular, hardly any of whom had undergone any selection, struggled with a significant lack of training and leadership.

This lack of professional, skilled and experienced leadership not only affected the lower ranks, but also the entire Dutch armed forces in Indonesia from top to bottom. In many respects, General Spoor also lacked the exper-

tise, experience and training needed to lead an operation of such unprecedented scale and duration, with inexperienced and poorly equipped troops, whilst also having to act as a pivot between political intentions and military reality. The training was adjusted over time, of course, but by then there were strong indications that within the armed forces in Indonesia the use of force was not only based on legality and proportionality, but also on the frequent use of extreme violence.

From 1945, as mentioned above, the Dutch authorities acted as though they were dealing with ‘gangs’, ‘*rampokkers*’ and ‘insurgents’ who had to be suppressed harshly. A key administrative instrument for this purpose was the declaration of a state of emergency: the State of War and the State of Siege (martial law). The State of Siege in particular, which had been invoked on 10 May 1940 and was not immediately repealed after the Japanese surrender, gave the Military Authority far-reaching powers in relation to internment, expulsion and censorship, in order to maintain or restore order, as it was called. The colonial administration and the rest of the civilian apparatus thus became subordinate to the military, even though Van Mook officially remained commander-in-chief. Measures under these emergency laws had to be established and published by decree, but in ‘special cases’ an order could be given in writing or orally, provided that the (lieutenant) governor general was informed as soon as possible. On these grounds, the Dutch authorities frequently used emergency military powers (*Verordeningen Militair Gezag*, VMG) to restrict the freedoms of the Indonesian population, especially on Java and Sumatra. A complex patchwork of locally applicable regulations gradually emerged. Moreover, martial law intensified the increasing intertwining of the military and civilian justice systems, including in relation to personnel. This was all the more risky because military justice gave priority to serving military ends, not the rights of the individual.<sup>16</sup> In that sense, too, the emergency powers provided an opportunity for harsh crackdowns. There were limits, however. For example, the regulations based on these powers, as explicitly noted in contemporary legal reports and by army leaders, provided no legal basis for the use of ‘summary justice’, even though this unlawful practice was frequently used on South Sulawesi, in any case.

With the exception of professional military men, service was of limited duration. War volunteers signed up for two or a maximum of three years; conscripts were called up to serve for two years. This meant that from 1947, experienced military had to be relieved by newcomers. In practice, things

worked out slightly differently. Facing unexpectedly large military setbacks and problems with the planned 'pacification', the army leadership persuaded the government to extend the periods of service in 1948 and 1949. In the end, the war volunteers served for an extra six months on average, and half of the conscripts for not two but three years. Military reports and egodocuments show that the extension of service was hard for the soldiers involved and badly affected their morale, certainly in the final year of the war. The restrictions on repatriation were not lifted until 1 June 1949.

At the Round Table Conference (23 August–2 November 1949), it was agreed that the Netherlands would withdraw its troops no later than half a year after the transfer of sovereignty. This proved unworkable, as too little space was available on the ships. In the end, repatriation did not commence properly until mid-1950. One year later, the last KNIL soldiers returned to the Netherlands. The KNIL – renamed the Royal Netherlands Indonesian Army in September 1948, in the vain hope that it would form the backbone of the army of the Federation of Indonesian States – was disbanded on 26 July 1950. The last KNIL soldiers, now demobilized, arrived in the Netherlands in mid-1951. Among them were 4,000 Moluccans and their families. The Dutch Military Mission in Jakarta, intended to promote bilateral cooperation, was disbanded in 1954.

### THE COURSE OF THE WAR

The phasing of the war of independence depends on the perspective that one chooses. From an Indonesian perspective, the struggle only really ended with the transfer of Papua (Irian Barat/New Guinea) in 1962; in addition, a number of internal Indonesian conflicts that emerged in 1945–1949 continued into the 1960s. When it comes to the Dutch military conduct, we can identify four phases running from 15 August 1945 to the formal transfer of sovereignty on 27 December 1949. Strictly speaking, the subsequent period, in which there were several military confrontations and violent incidents, was not part of the war.<sup>17</sup>

It is important to note that most of the main combat operations in the Indonesian War of Independence took place on Java, and to a lesser extent on Sumatra. Elsewhere in the archipelago, the Dutch reoccupation was effective and the Republic gained less of a foothold, although there were short but bloody conflicts on Bali, Kalimantan (around Banjarmasin) and in particular Sulawesi (around Makassar), some of which had a long aftermath.

## PHASE 1: AUGUST 1945 – NOVEMBER 1946

The first phase ran from the Japanese surrender and the Indonesian declaration of independence on 15 and 17 August 1945, respectively, to the Linggarjati Agreement and the departure of the British in late November 1946. The build-up of the Indonesian armed forces started immediately, while the Dutch military presence was marginal at first. The British army brought the disarmament and repatriation of Japanese troops and the evacuation of civilians and prisoners of war from Japanese internment camps to a largely successful conclusion, but the British also unwittingly became a party to the war of independence, intensifying their desire for a speedy departure.

The return of Dutch rule was symbolized by the arrival of Lieutenant Governor General Van Mook on 2 October 1945. The rebuilding of the KNIL was now gathering pace, manned by soldiers who had survived the Japanese camps or fled to Australia and Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka), and mainly by fresh Indonesian recruits. In September 1945 the first volunteer battalions embarked from the Netherlands. On 2 November, however, as mentioned above, SEAC forbade more Dutch troops to land; the first volunteer battalions and the Marine Brigade had to stay in British Malaya for months on end. Van Mook, the Dutch army leadership and the servicemen dispatched overseas experienced their ally's landing ban as a slap in the face, whereas the British believed it was impossible to do otherwise. Sukarno had protested vehemently against the arrival of Dutch troops, which he thought would only further endanger the safety of the Europeans and Indo-Europeans. Most of the latter were confined in Republican-controlled camps; 'protection camps' according to the Republic, 'hostage camps' according to its opponents. Moreover, the British, already concerned about what they saw as the provocative and extremely violent behaviour of the still-small KNIL units and armed Dutch civilians in Jakarta and Bandung, believed that the arrival of more Dutch troops would be tantamount to pouring oil on the revolutionary flames. In short, the British had every reason to force the Netherlands to negotiate with the Republic, and the landing ban was meant to help achieve this. From early February 1946, after talks had started between the Republic and the Netherlands, the British nevertheless allowed Dutch troops onto Java and Sumatra.

The start of the first phase was marked by two extremely dramatic developments. Almost immediately after the Japanese surrender, a period of extreme violence broke out, later known in the Netherlands as *bersiap*. The violence was not only directed against Europeans, Indo-Europeans, Chinese

and other groups, but also against Indonesians during the *berdaulat*, the term used to describe the intra-Indonesian violence. The second dramatic episode was the British-Indonesian Battle of Surabaya. The former period – *bersiap* – lasted from September 1945 to March 1946; the extreme violence in these months against (Indisch) Dutch and other groups and people who were associated with the Dutch or the Japanese occupation thus took place prior to the arrival of substantial numbers of troops from the Netherlands. There is no consensus in the historiography on the number of victims; estimates of European and Indo-European fatalities range from 3,500 to multiples of this, as well as perhaps tens of thousands of Indonesian and 10,000 Chinese fatalities.<sup>18</sup>

To this day, the bloody Battle of Surabaya (27 October–20 November 1945) is celebrated in Indonesia as marking the beginning of the armed struggle in defence of independence. The enormous asymmetry in the death tolls and the British use of heavy weapons and harsh collective punishments formed a pattern that would later be echoed by Dutch operations.<sup>19</sup> The British also suppressed revolutionary violence in Jakarta in late 1945, this time not with heavy weapons but mainly through mass arrests during Operation Pounce. The Republican government called on its weakened armed groups to leave the city, after which the fighting shifted further into rural areas; the government was forced – by threats to Sjahrir by KNIL soldiers, among other things – to move its seat to Yogyakarta on 4 January 1946. Indonesian troops also fought British, Japanese, and Dutch troops in other Javanese towns in this period, notably in Semarang, Bandung and Ambarawa.

The Indonesian extreme violence against groups associated with colonialism was curbed somewhat in March 1946, mainly thanks to British and Japanese efforts, but the Chinese population in particular lived under persistent threat, as shown by the bloodbath of Tangerang in May 1946, for example, in which hundreds of Chinese died. In the meantime, the Dutch armed forces were taking over more and more locations from British troops and expanding their territory, notably in West Java between Jakarta, Bogor and Bandung, and in East Java around Surabaya. Dutch units also recaptured territory on Sumatra with military operations that, yet again, had not been cleared with the British commanders on the ground. This prompted protests from the British and new confrontations with Indonesian fighters. Again, the fatalities were distributed very unevenly. The Linggarjati Agreement, concluded under great pressure from the British on 15 November 1946, gave the latter the opportunity to withdraw their last troops. They

left behind more than a thousand fallen and missing military, mainly British Indians and Gurkhas. The Dutch military build-up now continued at an accelerated pace.

Japanese military played a role in the first phase, too. A small number joined the Indonesian side, as mentioned above; much more important from a military perspective, though, was the fact that the British were temporarily forced to call on their former enemy as auxiliaries, due to the shortage of troops. This deployment resulted in many more Japanese war deaths than during the conquest of the Dutch East Indies in 1942.<sup>20</sup> The number of Indonesian fatalities at the hands of Japanese soldiers is not known but was much higher, partly as a consequence of bloody reprisals for Indonesian actions.

## PHASE 2: NOVEMBER 1946 – AUGUST 1947

The second phase was characterized by continuous, mostly small-scale skirmishes and a gradual and limited expansion by military means of the territory occupied by the Dutch. This phase ended with the first major Dutch offensive, the deceptively named ‘police action’ known as ‘Operation Product’ or *Agresi Militer Belanda 1*. The common threads in this period were truce violations on both sides and the gradual demise of the Linggarjati Agreement.

Indonesian reservations about ‘Linggarjati’, which were already strong, particularly within the army, were reinforced by the continued Dutch military build-up. As it had not been possible to reach a joint agreement on the borders between Indonesian and Dutch territory, Spoor unilaterally established demarcation lines on 22 November 1946. In the following months, there were constant violations of these lines by the TNI and other armed groups, as seen from a Dutch perspective, or legitimate attempts to recapture territory, as seen from an Indonesian perspective. The Netherlands also engaged in operations on the other side of the demarcation lines. The situation escalated when – despite an agreement that the administration around Bogor (Buitenzorg) would remain in Republican hands – the local commander, Colonel Lodewijk Thomson, arrested local Republican administrators on 19 December, on suspicion of subversive actions. This reinforced the scepticism about the Netherlands’ intentions felt by Republican political and military leaders, and TNI commander-in-chief Sudirman called for the fight to continue. Dutch commanders seized on Van Mook’s order to prepare for Republican attacks by zealously launching their own offensive



*Photo seized by the Regiment Storm Troops, showing Indonesian soldiers with a mix of weapons and uniforms, South Sumatra, between 1946 and 1948. Source: NIMH.*

operations. The British had hardly departed when the fighting re-erupted.

The military struggle spread from Java, where the fighting was fierce, including around Surabaya, to population centres on Sumatra. There were constant small-scale military skirmishes there, too, but also some large battles, including around Padang, Medan and Palembang. The Dutch armed forces occupied more and more territory, but it proved more difficult to establish a sustainable civilian administration. On South Sulawesi, colonial rule – which was considered to be seriously under threat – was re-imposed in heavy-handed fashion by the DST led by Captain Raymond Westerling and other KNIL troops. Between mid-December 1946 and 22 February 1947, at least 3,500 unarmed Indonesians were publicly executed without any kind of trial or legal basis. The Dutch Navy also took offensive action, including against the Republican flagship *Gadjah Mada* (4 January 1947). As with many other military actions, Van Mook was not informed of this in advance.

The Dutch army command saw little benefit in restarting the negotiations and was in favour of offensive action; in this context, Spoor spoke of capturing Yogyakarta as a simple ‘walkover’. The eventual signing of ‘Ling-

garjati' on 25 March 1947, four months after the agreement had been concluded, proved meaningless in military and political terms. The Republic had signed the original agreement with great hesitation, whilst the Netherlands approved a version that had been unilaterally 'adjusted' to meet its own wishes. This, in turn, reinforced Indonesian doubts. Little came of the implementation, and the treaty was revoked by the Drees cabinet on 20 July 1947; this was now less risky, because the last Europeans and Indo-Europeans had left the Republican camps. The next day, Spoor was ordered to launch Operation Product.

This Dutch offensive, undertaken by more than 100,000 soldiers, was successful in the sense that two-thirds of Java and one-third of Sumatra were occupied, including 1,100 plantations. Contrary to the pleas of military leaders, the Dutch government forbade any advance to the Republican seat of government, later described by Wim Schermerhorn (Labour) as 'plague-ridden Djokja'. Van Mook and Spoor were extremely frustrated by the government's decision, taken under great international pressure, to halt the offensive on 5 August 1947. Once again, the balance of casualties was very one-sided. On the Dutch side 76 soldiers were killed, while thousands died on the Indonesian side. The TNI remained undefeated, however; the army units withdrew into Indonesian areas and difficult-to-access parts of the territory occupied by the Netherlands.

### PHASE 3: AUGUST 1947 – DECEMBER 1948

After Operation Product/*Agresi Militer Belanda 1*, the Dutch anticipated a period of 'pacification' in which the recaptured territory would be 'purged' of opponents and brought under Dutch control. The phase in which this was attempted lasted until late 1948. In this period, the TNI and other armed groups mainly carried out a guerrilla war, to which the Dutch armed forces developed a rather ineffective counter-guerrilla response.

On 29 August 1947, Van Mook and Spoor again unilaterally drew a demarcation line on Java and Sumatra, the 'Van Mook line'. Their troops were tasked with consolidating the captured territory while the TNI made every effort to hamper them. Spoor pleaded in vain to push on to Yogyakarta. He even kept troops on standby for this for weeks on end, preventing them from taking part in the intended 'pacification'. The government in The Hague – again under great international pressure – took a different political tack. In mid-January 1948, the Renville Agreement was signed. This treaty also appeared to be militarily attractive to the Netherlands, because the Re-

public agreed to withdraw the TNI from the areas occupied by the Dutch. Around 30,000 TNI fighters did indeed withdraw, but numerous TNI soldiers and militias remained. On West Java, many joined the forces of Darul Islam (Hizbullah and Sabilillah), a powerful competitor of the Republic and the TNI.

In the first months after Renville, the number of armed confrontations fell sharply. This 'breathing space' facilitated the necessary rotations in the Dutch armed forces: the replacement of KNIL soldiers and war volunteers by new batches of conscripts. The armed forces lost much military experience as a result. From a Dutch perspective, this was all the more problematic because the negotiations about the implementation of Renville broke down in June 1948, and the Indonesian guerrilla war flared up once more. The situation became even more complex in late 1948; in West Java, a 'triangular war' broke out between the TNI, the Dutch armed forces and the armed wing of Darul Islam.<sup>21</sup> One important development for the TNI and the Republic was the violent suppression of the communist Madiun uprising in Central Java in September 1948. Not only did this victory promote the cohesion of the Republican camp and strengthen the position of the TNI, but the Republic and the TNI also gained credibility and thereby support in the West as a result, against the background of the fledgling Cold War. A further effect of 'Madiun' was the reduction of the large number of Indonesian troops and the seizure of the communist units' arms – in effect, a rationalization of the TNI.

The year 1948 was also marked by violations of the demarcation lines by both sides. The TNI and other armed groups attacked Dutch patrols, encampments, police posts, communication lines and enterprises, as well as Indonesians who held civilian posts in the Dutch administration or worked for the Dutch in some other capacity; cooperating with the colonial authority thus became increasingly risky. The Netherlands lacked the crucial support of the population in the guerrilla war. This meant that military operations acquired an increasingly hopeless character, not least because the Dutch armed forces were forced to split up into smaller units that had to control impossibly large areas with regular patrols and 'purges'. The army leadership realized that their own troops regularly overstepped the mark in doing so. In response to the massacre in Rawagede (now Balongsari) on 9 December 1947 and the many extrajudicial executions, 'special courts martial' were set up in March 1948 to curb extreme Dutch violence with potentially serious political repercussions. These courts martial were staffed by

judges, sitting alone, who could use accelerated proceedings to impose the death penalty on Indonesian ‘terrorists’ and ‘*rampokkers*’; they hardly had a moderating effect.

As in 1947, little came of the intended ‘pacification’, a combination of heavy-handed military action and the rebuilding of the administration. It hardly helped that repatriation had reduced the fighting force on Java from 48 battalions in April to 37 in August 1948. Bringing in Chinese and Indonesian auxiliaries failed to deliver the desired result. Spoor repeatedly indicated that he considered the situation untenable, and advocated larger-scale military intervention. He assumed that a second military offensive, focused on destroying the TNI and eliminating the Republican political and military leadership in Yogyakarta, would deliver the final blow to the opponent. A period of three to six months of intensive ‘purging’ would subsequently be sufficient to consolidate the regime and gain the support of the population. With strategic cabinet seats being taken by hawks from the Catholic KVP and Van Mook having been replaced, opposition to Spoor’s plan weakened further. After much hesitation, mainly by Labour Party ministers, the Drees cabinet approved the second ‘police action’.

*Army commander General Simon Spoor bids farewell to repatriating soldiers from 2-5 RI. Tanjung Priok, between 20 and 23 July 1948. Source: NIMH/Dienst voor Legercontacten.*



PHASE 4: DECEMBER 1948 – AUGUST /  
DECEMBER 1949

On 19 December 1948, Operation Kraai/*Agresi Militer Belanda 2* began, heralding the final and bloodiest phase of the war. This time Spoor was allowed to push on to Yogyakarta, where the Republic's political leaders were captured. The military leadership and most of the TNI managed to escape. The operation was less overwhelming than Operation Product, because the Indonesian opposition was by now better organized. Once again, the offensive was halted on 5 January under great international pressure; by the time of the cease-fire, the Netherlands occupied on paper the whole of Java, as well as large and strategic parts of Sumatra. Operation Kraai/*Agresi Militer Belanda 2* cost 113 Dutch lives, while more than 3,000 Indonesians were killed on Java alone.

Once more, the offensive was followed by a grim impasse of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare. The Dutch armed forces initially carried out large 'purges', making intensive use of artillery, the KST and the air force. The TNI suffered major setbacks on Java and Sumatra. Beyond the towns, effective Dutch authority remained extremely limited; it was contested by both the TNI and by competing armed groups, particularly Darul Islam. The hardening of the struggle was reflected in the enormous rise in the number of fatalities. On the Dutch side, the number of fallen servicemen rose from 34 per month in the months before the offensive to 155 in the following months; according to Dutch counts, the death toll on the Indonesian side was 46,800.<sup>22</sup> And that was not all; the Republicans viewed Indonesians who cooperated militarily or administratively with the Dutch regime – policemen, security guards, informants, civil and judicial officials – as legitimate targets of ruthless reprisals and intimidation. This, too, contributed to the spiral of violence. As a result of this, and due to the development of local shadow Republican governments, the 'pacification' planned by the Dutch failed.

Partly due to the repatriation of the first batches, the Dutch armed forces faced a serious shortage of experienced soldiers in the final years of the war, especially in the officer ranks. As mentioned above, Spoor observed regretfully that relatively inexperienced soldiers had been promoted prematurely and given responsibilities for which they were not equipped. The armed forces had to control ever-larger areas, and were eventually spread over some 2,000 isolated outposts, situated along or at the end of long supply lines that were impossible to secure permanently. As they were extremely vulnerable



*'Slowly but surely ... we fight to the last man!' A watercolour by an Indonesian fighter with the initials A.K. The artist collected twenty striking watercolours and drawings in a book to 'commemorate the Indonesian war'. The collection fell into Dutch hands in May 1949.*

Source: A.K., Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

to Indonesian attacks on these hazardous roads, in the long run the soldiers at many of these posts were more concerned with survival than with 'purges', let alone with helping to build a civilian administration.

The historiography shows that Dutch counter-operations in these dire circumstances regularly degenerated into counter-terror, something that was also confirmed by the soldiers themselves. One KL soldier noted: 'We have far too few troops and are trying to solve this by taking harsher action. By shooting everything off the road and burning down *kampongs* if needs be'. Corporal J. Eshuis wrote: 'Liberating the population is more like exercising terror'. The above-mentioned sharp rise in Indonesian fatalities, although it is likely to have involved fighters, should perhaps be read as an indication of this.<sup>23</sup>

In April 1949, shortly before his death, Spoor was still optimistic, although it was telling that he now claimed that 'pacification' would take a year and a half, not three to six months. Back in The Hague, the Drees-Van Schaik cabinet was more pessimistic and no longer gave much credence to Spoor's rose-tinted reports. Under great international pressure, the gov-

ernment decided to resume the negotiations with the Republic in April. This resulted in the Rum-Van Roijen Agreement on 7 May, and a cease-fire was agreed. On 22 June, the Dutch evacuated Yogyakarta, giving rise to a persistent back-stabbing legend in which Dutch soldiers blamed national and international politicians for a defeat that could have been prevented militarily. The final cease-fire was announced for Java on 10 August and Sumatra on 14 August. In the subsequent period, until the transfer of sovereignty on 27 December 1949, the level of Dutch-Indonesian – as opposed to intra-Indonesian – violence fell significantly, although there were still violent confrontations in the second half of 1949 on Java and Sumatra, and also on Sulawesi and Kalimantan; again, with many victims mainly on the Indonesian side.

### ‘EXTREME VIOLENCE’ IN THE DUTCH HISTORIOGRAPHY

Reports of extreme violence by the Dutch armed forces were brought to public notice on an occasional basis during the war, particularly in 1949 and also afterwards, but the political and social debates did not begin until war veteran Joop Hueting made his revelations in 1969. That history will be told in part II of this book.<sup>24</sup> In this chapter, we highlight a different dimension of the debate, namely the development of the historiography, for it is of direct relevance to this research programme. That historiography, almost without exception, consists of works by Dutch historians; there has been little interest in the international and the Indonesian historiography, past and present, in questions relating to the Dutch use of violence. This last section also looks ahead to the following chapter, in which we round off the introductory part of this book by setting out some of the conclusions and questions that shaped the implementation of the research programme.

For decades, the *Excessennota* [Memorandum on excesses, 1969], which was commissioned by the government and compiled in several months only by an official commission, was regarded as the canonical inventory of violent ‘infringements’ by the Dutch armed forces, so far as these had left archival traces. As the researchers noted at the time, the list was incomplete – a reservation that was watered down by the De Jong cabinet in order to make room for its statement that ‘the armed forces as a whole had behaved correctly in Indonesia’. The memo had no academic pretensions, nor did it attempt to explain the ‘excesses’. Both the collated source material and the cabinet’s

subsequent conclusions continued to form a benchmark for later historical studies, but this provoked increasingly critical reactions.

*Ontsporing van geweld* [Derailment of Violence, 1970], written by sociologists and war veterans Jacques van Doorn and Wim Hendrix, proved to be a ground-breaking study. Based on research carried out at their own initiative into some 80 ‘infringements’ during their service in Indonesia more than 20 years beforehand, they described the military conduct – always anonymously – and offered explanations for it. The essence of their argument was that in an increasingly hopeless guerrilla conflict, the army leaders had provided ambiguous instructions on the use of force and inadequate leadership. Responsibility for the extent of the violence was thus shifted *de facto* to lower-ranking infantry officers and non-commissioned officers, who were insufficiently equipped for the task, and unable – and perhaps less inclined – to prevent excessive violence. They operated in a ‘trap of violence’, in which the constant threat of being overwhelmed by superior numbers of enemy guerrillas was countered with extreme violence. In their view, the infringements or excesses were not mere incidents, but a recurring pattern. Their definition of ‘infringements’ included not only practices such as ‘summary’ – in other words, unlawful – executions, but also the routine extreme violence perpetrated during interrogations by the intelligence services and during daily patrols and purges, as well as the bombing and shelling of *kampongs*.

Like Hueting, Doorn and Hendrix believed that the cases listed in the *Excessennota* were merely the tip of the iceberg. Despite the limitations of their research – little archival research, the anonymization of cases they had compiled themselves – *Ontsporing van geweld* is still regarded as an influential study. That is also true of the supplement that the authors provided for the new edition in 1983, in which they were the first to take an international comparative approach – one that reflected remarkably well on the Netherlands, one should add. This comparative angle was only taken up once more in a systematic fashion by the current research programme.<sup>25</sup>

In later years, three cases that were briefly described in the *Excessennota* were investigated in separate studies. In 1984, historian Willem IJzereef published *De Zuid-Celebes affaire* [The South Sulawesi Affair], based on his thesis on the extremely harsh intervention by the special forces led by Captain Westerling in 1946-1947. The campaign resulted in at least 3,500 casualties, and is thereby considered the most serious Dutch ‘excess’ – a term that IJzereef also used – of the war. In 1997, Ad van Liempt published *De lijken-*

*trein* [The corpse train] about a prisoner transport in Bondowoso, East Java, in 1947, in which 46 Indonesian men died as a result of culpable neglect. In 2007, Harm Scholtens wrote the unpublished thesis, *Rawagede, 9 December 1947*, about a KL operation in which around 120, according to Dutch internal correspondence – or 430, according to Indonesian counts – Indonesians were ‘summarily’ executed.

That it took so long for these publications to appear is in itself remarkable, as is the fact that not one of them was written by an established historian. But it was the doyen of Dutch national historiography, Loe de Jong, who eventually put the cat among the pigeons with the twelfth volume of his series *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* [The Kingdom of the Netherlands in the Second World War, 1988]. In a draft version, De Jong wrote uncompromisingly about ‘war crimes’ and drew harsh comparisons with German actions in the occupied Netherlands. After much commotion, he replaced the term ‘war crimes’ with ‘excesses’ and moderated his terminology and tone somewhat; but the overall picture that he painted was nevertheless extremely critical of the Dutch use of force, as well as military and political leaders’ responsibility for it.

In the following years, the Dutch conduct of the war in a broader sense was mainly addressed by military historians working at the predecessor of today’s NIMH. In *Marsroutes en dwaalsporen* [Marching routes and wrong turns, 1991], Petra Groen drew critical conclusions about Spoor’s military-strategic policy. Even though his ‘spearhead strategy’ was utterly lacking in realism, he had clung on to it until the bitter end. Groen did not focus on extreme violence as a separate category *per se*, but argued plausibly that the military leadership, with political support, had persisted with a mode of combat that had inevitably resulted in much violence, including against the civilian population.

Groen’s later colleague, Jaap de Moor, published two substantial studies. In *Westerling’s oorlog* [Westerling’s war, 1999], he describes the history of the Dutch special forces in the war, paying significant attention to Westerling’s actions in South Sulawesi. Although he is reluctant to draw general conclusions about the use of violence by the armed forces as a whole, he does make it clear that the DST, and later the KST, undoubtedly acted extremely harshly and frequently crossed the line. De Moor’s biography *Generaal Spoor* (2011) does not focus on the use of violence by the armed forces either, but this study does support the image of a ‘political general’ who persisted with a risky, enemy-focused strategy, thereby creating the conditions for an

inevitable hardening of the conflict. This essentially confirmed Van Doorn and Hendrix's picture of a trap of violence, and Groen's analysis of a failing military-strategic policy.

Stef Scagliola's study *Last van de oorlog* [Burden of the war], published in 2002, does not investigate the war *per se*, but mainly its aftermath. She focuses on the course of the public debate about what she unequivocally describes as 'war crimes', and thus on cycles of silence, concealment and (re)discovery. *Last van de oorlog* is of particular significance to the research on the Dutch use of violence in an indirect sense, because Scagliola reveals the strength of the mechanisms within the armed forces and the veteran community that functioned to cover up the violence, a phenomenon that had already been identified by Van Doorn and Hendrix. In this research programme, *Last van de oorlog* was of particular importance to the 'Aftermath' sub-project.

In terms of academic interest in the war, the fact that there was a turn-around in the last decade was not only shown by the 2012 plea – initially in vain – by the KITLV, the NIMH and NIOD for a broader investigation, but also by the publications that have since appeared. In the end, the present research programme would not be launched until 2017. In the intervening years, however, a number of studies on the war violence were published. These were, successively, the collection *Colonial Counterinsurgency and Mass Violence* (2014), edited by Bart Luttikhuis and A. Dirk Moses, with various contributions from the KITLV, the NIMH and NIOD; *Soldaat in Indonesië* [Soldier in Indonesia] by Gert Oostindie (2015); and, in particular, Rémy Limpach's *Brandende kampongs* [Burning kampongs, 2016]. Other publications included two articles on the extreme violence by former NIMH researcher Thijs Brocades Zaalberg (2014, 2015).

The conclusions of these publications are consistent in the sense that they characterize the Dutch use of violence as structurally excessive, and thus reject its framing as 'incidental excesses'. The studies use different terminology, however – Luttikhuis and Moses use 'mass violence', Brocades Zaalberg uses 'excessive violence' and 'war crimes', Oostindie uses 'war crimes', Limpach uses 'extreme violence' and 'mass violence' – and the same applies to the use of sources. Limpach's *Brandende kampongs*, the commercial edition of the doctoral thesis he defended in Switzerland in 2015, is based on the most in-depth research into the extreme violence and incorporates all of the above-mentioned studies. His book formed the catalyst for the Dutch government's decision to fund this research programme.

Towards the end of the research programme, various articles were published that provided in-depth knowledge with regard to specific points; they are not discussed individually here, but many of them will be covered in the second part of the book. Regarding the problem of estimating the number of victims, reference should be made here to a recent article by Limpach, in which he highlights the asymmetry in the mode of warfare and casualties,

*Corporal S. van Langen of battalion 3-7 RI wrote about a surprise attack on his post on 29 September 1947: 'A frenzied mob from a kampong, led by a few Hadjis and peloppers [fighters] armed with carbines, attacked our post in Goeboeg [Gubung, Central Java]. Aside from the guards, the men were still sleeping at the 3rd Company, for it was still early in the morning. The horde rushed up to the fence, got it open, and stormed up the path to the sleeping company. Then the guards started up the machine guns. They fell like mown corn. When the attackers took to their heels, the dead were still lying there; 31 men.'*

Source: S. van Langen, NIMH.



and in so doing moreover reflects explicitly on the way in which the war was fought on the Indonesian side. He also stresses the weak grounds for quantification.<sup>26</sup>

Also of interest – as a concise summary of previous research – are several chapters from the overview by Piet Hagen, *Koloniale oorlogen in Indonesië* [Colonial wars in Indonesia, 2018] and, in particular, the substantial text book *Krijgsgeweld en kolonie* [Military violence and colony, 2021], part of the NIMH series *Militaire Geschiedenis van Nederland* [Military history of the Netherlands]. Groen and Limpach summarize the period 1945-1949 in around 70 pages. Not surprisingly, their conclusions are similar to those in their earlier work. Finally, it can be noted that various smaller publications based on source research, which are not discussed here, conclude almost without exception that the Dutch armed forces were guilty of the structural use of extreme violence.

In his PhD thesis *‘Zoeken, aangrijpen en vernietigen!’* [‘Search, attack and destroy!’; 2021], Christiaan Harinck – a former doctoral student at the KITLV, although not affiliated with this programme – shifts the focus from specific cases of extreme violence to an analysis of the consequences of the army leaders’ strategy for the resulting widespread use of violence and their adherence to a highly enemy-focused doctrine. He concludes – in line with the earlier conclusions of Groen and De Moor, among others – that the learning capacity of the armed forces, particularly that of the military leadership, was poor. The enemy-focused approach, which was derived from colonial experience and based on violent oppression, continued to prevail even when it was repeatedly shown not to work. As a result, the army leadership’s only real response, time and again, was to escalate: deploying even harsher means, which led to even more casualties. Harinck thereby emphasizes that the line between ‘regular’ and ‘extreme’ violence was usually blurred and often difficult to determine *post facto*.

An entirely contrary approach is taken by Bauke Geersing, a lawyer who trained at the Royal Military Academy. In *Kapitein Westerling* (2019), Geersing adheres strictly to the legal frameworks that were used by the Dutch government at the time; in his view, no Indonesian state existed, which meant there was no war and by definition no ‘war crimes’, either. His interpretation of Westerling’s actions is largely consistent with the image that the captain himself presented in his memoirs: his actions were harsh but fair, they were a successful response to the need to suppress terrorism posing as nationalism, and they were approved from above – and thus legitimate. However,

Geersing does not offer any evidence to support the claim that Westerling's actions were legally defensible.<sup>27</sup>

For the sake of completeness, it should be added that a large number of media publications on the war have also appeared in the last decade, as well as egodocuments by or about veterans and, finally, two works in the genre of literary (historical) non-fiction: Martin Bossenbroek's *De wraak van Diponegoro* [Diponegoro's revenge, 2020] and David van Reybrouck's *Revolusi* [Revolution, 2020]. The picture painted by much of this work – one that in the case of *Revolusi* has certainly drawn widespread publicity – is consistent with the prevailing state of the scholarship described above.

# Interim conclusions

The three preceding chapters outlined the background to the research programme, as well as the political-historical and military-historical context. This interim section functions as a bridge to the second part of the book. In line with the programme design and funding, the aim of the research was to answer ‘the most important questions in relation to decolonization policy, violence and war – with a focus on (explaining) the Dutch military conduct’, whilst ‘paying ample attention to the historical, political and international context and aftermath of the war’. The focus was on the research into the conduct of the war, more specifically, the use of extreme violence by the Dutch armed forces, its consequences, and the extent to which responsibility was taken for this extreme violence both at the time and afterwards. Based on the state of academic knowledge at the start of the programme, there was little reason to doubt that the Dutch armed forces were guilty of more than incidental use of excessive force during the war. The question is to what extent did this happen, and how can this be explained; and that is preceded by the question of why the Netherlands went to war.

Drawing on the existing historiography, it was relatively straightforward to answer the latter question without doing further research. Exceptions aside, Dutch politicians were convinced they had both the right and the duty to ‘liberate’ the Dutch East Indies from Japan and subsequently from

the Republic of Indonesia, and to retain Indonesia for the kingdom in some way on a permanent basis. Economic, geopolitical and ethical arguments were advanced to justify this. As the existing literature provides sufficient grounds for this interpretation, the programme did not re-investigate this issue at length. However, the sub-project on the international political context did raise the question of the extent to which Dutch policy attracted support, or rather criticism. Furthermore, the sub-project on the *bersiap* period looked at whether the violence in this period might have constituted an (additional) argument or pretext for the military intervention.

How was the war fought and what can we already conclude, based on the historiography, about the Dutch use of force and its consequences? That the war increasingly assumed the nature of a guerrilla conflict is a given, as is the fact that the number of casualties was distributed very unevenly. When describing the warfare, much previous research focused on the actions of the infantry. When designing this research programme, we therefore decided to focus sub-projects on two elements of warfare that had received less attention from researchers in the past, and that are often associated with extreme violence and the discrepancy in casualty numbers: namely, technical violence and the intelligence services.

More broadly, it was a challenge to improve on the existing estimates of casualties of war violence, including the question of which parts of the armed forces were more or less responsible for these and the question of the proportion of civilian casualties in these figures. A number of sub-projects addresses this issue, and there was every reason to do so. In contrast to the claim of the De Jong cabinet that the 'excesses' were 'incidental', the prevailing view in the current historiography is that the extreme violence was structural or sometimes even systematic in character. However, this raises the question of which criteria should be used to determine this. Quantification could offer part of the answer, but it is clear that this is an extremely difficult, perhaps impassable road, one that leads only to limited or fragmentary results.

The main question requires conceptual consideration. Various terms are used in the historiography, such as 'inordinate' or 'excessive violence', 'extreme violence', 'mass violence' and 'war crimes'. In this research programme, we preferred to use concrete descriptions of such acts and the concept of 'extreme violence' as an overarching term. In the first chapter it was stated that there are powerful arguments for the claim that the core of international humanitarian law was applicable, or at least considered applicable, by the

Netherlands, and that the actions of the Dutch armed forces could and can be measured against those rules. Indeed, according to many sources this is consistent with the intuitive sense of justice felt by many of the military men involved, who expressed their views as to whether certain acts of war had ‘crossed the line’.

On the one hand, the analytical concept of ‘extreme violence’ refers to violence that was largely used outside direct regular combat situations against civilians or fighters, who may or may not have served in the Indonesian army and who were disarmed after their capture or surrender, usually without direct military necessity or without a clearly-defined military objective. On the other hand, forms of extreme violence were also used within regular combat. This mostly involved the use of heavy (but also light) weaponry, whereby the risk of civilian casualties was evidently disregarded. In many of the thousands of combat engagements involving Dutch troops and Indonesian fighters – often literally situations of kill or be killed – it is impossible to determine whether proportionate violence tipped over into disproportionate violence. This is mainly due to the limited source material. What can be said with certainty, however, is that the Dutch units usually had great ‘fire superiority’ and made ample use of this, resulting in a large imbalance in the casualty numbers: there were many more dead and wounded on the Indonesian side than on the Dutch side.

The aim of this study is thus not to draw conclusions about the overall extent of the extreme violence as such, but rather to identify, as well as we can, the situations – within or beyond military action – in which forms of violence occurred, whether structurally or systematically or otherwise. The concept of ‘extreme violence’ functions primarily as a way to describe the nature of the warfare, but it simultaneously opens up possibilities for considering the impact of the violence on the victims and the moral or legal aspects of this violence. After all, as mentioned above, these forms of violence were contrary to everything that contemporary Dutch political and military leaders claimed to stand for, and clashed with widely held moral values, often those held by the perpetrators themselves.

Needless to say, the choice of this overarching concept does not imply that the Dutch armed conduct would have been lawful had extreme violence not been used. This question goes back to the debate about the legitimacy of the Dutch warfare, which could in fact only be justified from a colonial perspective. But this conceptualization does create the space to ask questions about the proportionality of the military action, given the decision to go to war.

Let us return to the main question about the mode of warfare, and thus the question of why the Dutch conduct of war was so (extremely) violent. The existing literature identifies clusters of factors, aside from the highly violent nature of Indonesian guerrilla warfare. The most important of these include the unrealistic and therefore risky military strategy pursued with inadequate resources based on an underestimation of the opponent, which lowered the threshold for extreme violence; political policies that had no effective preventive effect; and the failure and often the obduracy of the civilian and military-judicial authorities, resulting in a practice of secrecy and impunity. In addition, the literature highlights the quality and culture of the armed forces: inadequate leadership, inexperience and lack of education, training, information and discipline, as well as a lack of learning capacity at the conceptual (or doctrinal) level; continuity of administrative and military traditions rooted in exemplary violence and the maintenance of colonial prestige, passed on via the KNIL to the military dispatched from the Netherlands – in short, an inward-looking culture in which failing leadership facilitated arbitrary action and excessive violence. In the final phase of the war, according to many sources, there was also the physical and mental exhaustion of the soldiers in the field as a result of the perceived futility of their own actions and the repeated postponement of their repatriation.

The results of the sub-projects are presented in the second part of this book. By choosing these projects in particular, the research programme aimed to investigate the explanatory factors listed above in more depth, and possibly add others. Although each of these sub-projects had its own focus, we found that they often overlapped. For example, both the research on the *bersiap* period and the Dutch-Indonesian ‘Regional Studies’ sub-project provide new insights into the extremely complex dynamics of violence that involved multiple armed groups, some organized and some not, and how this affected the Indonesian population. Both the chapters about the intelligence war and the deployment of heavy weapons aim to examine aspects of the Dutch military action that are still relatively under-researched, but almost automatically raise questions about the chain of command, views on proportionality and the concealment of extreme violence. Both the research on the military justice system and that on how administrators and politicians ‘handled’ reports of extreme violence focus on the way in which such behaviour was or was not judged and punished, and whether this did or did not have a preventive effect. The international comparative research on violence in decolonization wars is directly related to this: in this chap-

ter, the tension between liability and impunity forms an important theme. The sub-project on international involvement in the war is likewise partly concerned with questions about whether or not to share information about violence. Finally, the research on the aftermath of the war investigates how and why the concealment of the violence and the avoidance of public debate about it persisted long after the war.

In short, each of the contributions in part II, individually but also in combination, aims to provide answers to aspects of the overarching research question. In the Conclusions, these answers will be brought together and an attempt will be made to answer these questions.

Next pages: *Two pages from the photo album of sergeant and war volunteer B. Berends, who was attached to the carrier platoon of the 4th battalion of the 5th Infantry Regiment (4-5 R.I.). Most photos relate to daily life in the army, but a few pages also bear witness to the tough reality of the war. Malang, East Java, early August 1947. Inscriptions: 'Prisoners. Malang, Aug. 1947 / A moment for a Caravelles / Across the makeshift bridge / Prisoners / Bearers of Safety and Law ...? / Bedali Kampong, from which we came under fire / Prisoners / "Freedom is the glory of every nation. Indonesia for Indonesians!"*

Source: Photographer unknown, NIOD/Berends Collection.



Gerangenen.

Malang.

Aug. 47.



Even tijd voor een  
Caravelles.



Over de noodbrug

Gerangenen





Bringers van  
Veiligheid en  
Recht?

Kampung Belakli van waar uit we een beetje  
vuur kregen.



Gerangenen.

"Vrijheid is de  
Glorie van  
jeleere natie  
Indonesie voor  
Indonesiers."



