

Telegram from Lord Mountbatten on the situation in Indonesia (21 November 1945)

Caption: In a telegram dated 21 November 1945 and sent to the British Chiefs of Staff, the British Admiral Louis Mountbatten analyses the situation in Indonesia. He particularly comments on the Japanese surrender, Indonesia's declaration of independence on 17 August 1945 and the clashes between the Indonesian republican forces, the Japanese troops and the Dutch and allied forces. Lord Mountbatten describes his mission, which is mainly to liberate allied prisoners of war and to disarm and repatriate the Japanese forces.

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TOP SECRET CYPHER TELEGRAM

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IMMEDIATE.

IZ. 10634.
T.O.O. 211729Z.
T.O.R. ~~221005Z~~

From: S.A.C.S.E.A.

To: Cabinet Offices.
Repeated: J.S.M. Washington. X.COS.A.

SEACOS 552.

21st November, 1945.

Admiral Mountbatten to British Chiefs of Staff.

1. Reference Cabinet Offices Tel. 6795 of 18th November, and Field Marshal Wilson's telegram FMW.209 of 17th November, herewith the necessary information to form the background of the Foreign Secretary's statement and the debate in the House at the end of this week. Any statement made in America must touch on H.M. Government's policy if it is to be of any use. I suggest that the necessary statement could be made up in Washington from this material, since I am sure the Chiefs of Staff will agree that it would be improper for me as a Theatre Commander to make a policy announcement.
2. In order to estimate the size and nature of the problem involved in dealing with Java it must be recalled that it was as late as the 15th August that Java, Bali and Lombok were transferred from being a primarily American responsibility in the South East Pacific Command, to being a primarily British one, in the South East Asia Command. This involved the ultimate assumption by the latter of full responsibility for some 580,000 square miles, 52,500,000 inhabitants, 212,800 Japanese. The immediate problem in Java, Bali and Lombok is to deal with an additional area of some 55,000 square miles, 43,500,000 inhabitants and 74,000 Japanese.
3. In accordance with United Nations policy the tasks given to the South East Asia Command by the Combined Chiefs of Staff were to disarm, concentrate and prepare the Japanese forces for evacuation, and to protect and evacuate allied prisoners of war and internees.
4. In carrying out these tasks the main difficulties have arisen through the delay in the arrival of allied occupational troops. This resulted partly from the late date at which the South East Asia Command was given

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this responsibility (due to the suddenness of the Japanese collapse) and partly from the overall allied policy of General MacArthur that local Japanese surrenders were not to be arranged and occupational operations were not to be carried out until the general Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay was concluded. In addition, the shipping resources available to S.E.A.C. were insufficient to permit the simultaneous occupation of all areas for which the Supreme Allied Commander was responsible, and operations had accordingly to be carried out in the priority of importance of the various areas involved.

5. In the meantime on August 17th two days after the Japanese official acceptance of the Potsdam terms, the Indonesians with Japanese permission had proclaimed their independence, and had set up a so-called Nationalist Government, determined to resist the return of the Dutch.

6. I gave the Japanese the task of maintaining law and order pending the arrival of the allied occupational forces. This they have failed to do. In the early stages there were clashes between the Indonesians and the Japanese, with the result that by the time the allied forces arrived, the situation was out of hand, and a situation of disorder and mob violence prevailed which it was beyond the capacity of the Indonesian Nationalist Leaders to control. In these circumstances it became necessary for the allied occupational forces to set about re-establishing peaceful conditions before they could adequately undertake the specific tasks which they had been given. In no instance have the Japanese been used to quell Indonesian resistance. They have, on occasion, been employed on guard duties, and have fought the Indonesians in self defence when attacked, but the general evidence is that Japanese elements have been, and still are, assisting the Indonesians. The Japanese forces in Java are concentrated mainly at Sourabaya, Bandoeng and Batavia with detachments scattered throughout the island. It will be appreciated that in the conditions already described, there is little possibility of exercising effective control over such Japanese forces as have not yet been disarmed.

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8. The following figures give some idea of the magnitude and complexity of the task of dealing with allied prisoners of war and internees. There are 129000 Dutch Rapwi located in South East Asia as follows:-

- (a) 26000 in Rangoon, Singapore, Bangkok, Hongkong and Manila awaiting return to Java.
- (b) 4000 temporarily staged in Borneo.
- (c) 20200 in Sumatra.
- (d) 78000 in Java.

In addition there are some 40000 Asiatics and Eurasians in Java who have so far come in for protection. Numbers are increasing daily.

9. The 78800 Rapwi and 40000 displaced persons in Java are being concentrated for protection by our troops in four main areas, namely Batavia, Buitenzorg, Bandoeng and Semarang. There were originally 16000 Rapwi at Sourabaya, 6000 have already been evacuated to Singapore, which is now full to capacity. The remainder are being evacuated to Batavia, where conditions of law and order are more suitable for their protection.

10. The concentration of Rapwi and displaced persons for protection and relief is seriously hampered by the general disturbed and lawless conditions already described. There is no possibility of their release and resettlement in Java or acceptance from outside area, until peace-time conditions are re-established. The position of all these people is most distressing and their state of mind particularly of the women, is pitiful. Cases have been reported of mutilation of Rapwi and other atrocities, due to mob fever. An example is given in SAC.28767 T.O.O. 170425.

11. While the Dutch Rapwi domiciled in Java constitute the major problem, delay in returning Rapwi to Java from other areas is causing dissatisfaction especially in Bahgkak. There are only

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356 Rapwi of nationalities other than Dutch remaining in the Netherlands East Indies, 3540 having already been evacuated.

12. The fighting strength of the Indonesians is not accurately known. The best estimate in present evidence is approximately 100,000 of whom about one quarter are well armed and organised. The remainder are generally equipped with small arms but are not organised into units. These figures take account of the many armed and uncontrolled bands which infest the country, but do not take account of large mobs which may be whipped up to resistance and excesses by agitators in particular areas. As already explained there is evidence that Japanese are assisting the Indonesians and it is reported that before the entry of British Forces, the Japanese in East and Central Java (excluding Semarang) surrendered their arms and equipment to the Indonesians. Japanese reports which it has so far been unable to check through Allied sources indicate that such surrendered arms and equipment may include the following. 200 guns of all types. 690 heavy machine guns. 700 light machine guns. 25500 rifles, 1240 tommy guns. 3360 revolvers and large quantities of ammunition. A small number of Japanese and Dutch tanks and armoured fighting vehicles are probably in Indonesian hands.

13. The extent and intensity of the fighting in Java can be gauged and a proper sense of proportion given to it by considering the casualties incurred. Up to the 18th November, casualties reported were:-
British Officers and NCO's killed 21, wounded 21, missing 6. British and Indian other ranks:-
killed 92, wounded 336, missing 169. Indonesians killed and actually counted up to the same date were 592(597?) but it is estimated that as a result of fanatical attacks against modern weapons and equipment their total casualties were about 6500 killed and wounded, but the estimate is so approximate that it is suggested it should not be published.

14. Every effort is being made to avoid involving non combatants in the fighting and in addition maximum warning is being given to the Indonesians both by radio and leaflets in order to prevent unnecessary

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casualties. Careful consideration has been given to the use of aircraft, and only pinpoint bombing of known Indonesian Headquarters and strong points has been carried out after civilians have been warned to evacuate the areas. In addition, bombing has been restricted to situations in which our troops were in serious danger and no other effective form of bombardment can be carried out. In all only thirty 500 pound bombs have been dropped in Sourabaya singly on pin point targets and which in any case is only three quarters the maximum load of a single B-29.

15. No really adequate Dutch forces are yet in sight. Their internal security battalions are neither equipped nor trained for proper warfare, and have not brigade let alone divisional formations nor troops such as engineers, signals, etc. Thus I do not see how the Dutch forces can take over from us within measureable time, if their arrival will involve conflict with 100000 armed Indonesians and the active hostility of most of the remaining 43 millions of inhabitants.

16. One of Prince Bernhard's Staff Officers, Colonel Froewein recently passed through here on way to Batavia and I pointed out to him that there clearly was a time limit on the use of Indian troops in Java, because we would be unable under the present directive to continue to use them after:-

- (a) The date on which we completed the disarmament and removal of the Japanese and
- (b) The date on which we completed the concentration of Rapwi and the evacuation of those whom the Dutch Authorities wished taken out and for whom alternative accommodation could be found.

17. There is a further factor which I refrained from mentioning to him. Our troops went into Java with the highest possible morale. They are still fighting extremely well and their patience in carrying out difficult and distasteful operations

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have been beyond praise. But I feel it is my duty to point out that much of our difficulty is due to the fact that there is widespread suspicion that our policy is in fact other than has been officially given out.

18. My following telegram deals with this problem.

CIRCULATION.

T.O.O. 211737Z.

Foreign Office
First Sea Lord
C.I.G.S.
C.A.S.
M.O.I.
Defence Office