

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

Caption: On 21 November 1945, the British Admiral Louis Mountbatten sends the British Chiefs of Staff a telegram in which he asks for details on the British Government's position in Indonesia. In addition to their mission to release allied prisoners of war and to disarm and repatriate the Japanese armed forces, Lord Mountbatten asks whether the British forces should also be intervening in political matters with a view to restoring Dutch power in Indonesia.

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TOP SECRET CYPHER TELEGRAM

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IMMEDIATE.

IZ. 10637.
T.O.O. 211733Z.
* T.O.R. 230700Z.

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

To: Cabinet Offices.

Info: J.S.M. Washington. X COS A.

SEACOS 553.

21st November, 1945.

From: Mountbatten.

To: British Chiefs of Staff

Info: J.S.M. Washington.

1. In COSSEA 314 T.O.O. 131840 August, I was given the following instructions.

Para 1(a). The reoccupation of key areas of occupied territories, in order to seize effective control and to enforce the surrender and disarmament of the Japanese armed forces.

Para 1(b)(?). The earliest release of British and Allied prisoners of war and internees.

Para 3(g). Java. The despatch of forces to Java as soon as possible to accept the surrender of Japanese forces and to prepare for the eventual handing over of this country to the Dutch civil authorities. We are arranging to ship from there the Dutch security, foreign and civil affairs personnel.

Para 3(h). Sumatra. Occupation of Sumatra is a lower priority than that of Java, but should be effected as soon as forces and shipping permit.

2. In a statement issued from my headquarters on 15th October, I pointed out that we are responsible for maintaining a state of affairs which would enable COSSEA 314 paragraphs 1(d) and ~~(10 groups missing)~~ allowed any statement to be made implying that it was the intention of H.M. Government to restore Dutch sovereignty over their Colonial possessions by force of British arms. And our commanders in NEI have made no statements of this nature. They have always given out that their primary tasks were to complete the Japanese surrender and to release and evacuate allied prisoners of war and civilian internees, and that it was necessary to maintain law and order in the key points we occupy in order that these instructions can be carried out.

to be carried out. I have never

3. This has enabled us to obtain a truce in Sourabaya with the recognised leaders of the Indonesian Independence Movement. And although extremists have broken the truce we have been able to oppose the nationalists by force, since they were fighting against the orders of their own recognised leaders.

4. In accordance with paragraph 3 of my directive I assumed that Dutch forces adequate for the task of taking over their colonial possessions would arrive and would pass through the ports which I held and that then I would be allowed to withdraw my troops.

5. When COSSEA 314 was drafted there was no particular reason to suppose that an Indonesian Republic would be declared, and would in fact turn out to be a strongly organised Nationalist movement, prepared to resist the return of the Dutch Force of Arms, but I consider that we are reaching a position where we have either to declare that our policy is that on completion of tasks (a) and (b) we are going to withdraw or that we propose to restore Dutch sovereignty by force of arms.

6. It would consequently seem that we are drifting from what has been generally understood to have been H.M. Government's original intention, to a different interpretation of the directive.

7. This will be daily more and more apparent and I feel it is for H.M. Government to decide whether we are to drift into this state or make a declaration.

8. Unless we come into the open and inform the Indonesians, indeed the world at large, that we intend that NFZ shall be reoccupied by force of arms, we are in honour bound obliged to evacuate Sourabaya as soon as we have completed the disarming of the Japanese troops and the evacuation of the RAPWI in this area. If we stay on, when it is clear that we have accomplished these two objects, it can only be in order to introduce the Dutch forces against the will of the Indonesians, and I suggest it would be better in that case to declare our policy. In any case I shall require a ruling whether to stay in Sourabaya when this time comes against my present directive and against the declaration we made to the Indonesians, or whether I am to withdraw when I have completed paragraphs 1(a) and (b).

9. In the case of Batavia we have every reason for holding on, since it would be quite impossible to evacuate the whole of the RAPWI that we are concentrating

in this area, and presumably we can stay until the Dutch come in to take over their protection.

10. May I urge that the opportunity of this debate be taken to state unequivocally H.M. Government's policy is in Neif so that we who have to carry out that policy will no longer be left in any doubt as to what our instructions are.

CIRCULATION.

T.O.O. 211733Z.

Defence Office.

Foreign Office.

F.S.L.

C.6 Tels. * Check and repeat requested.

A.M.C.S. (C)

S. of S. Colonies.

S. of S. Dominions.

General Sir Mosley Mayne.