

Letter from the British Foreign Office on British policy in the Netherlands East Indies and in Indochina (London, 16 November 1945)

Caption: On 16 November 1945, John Cecil Sterndale Bennett from the British Foreign Office informs J. B. Sidebotham from the Colonial Office about British policy in the Netherlands East Indies and Indochina. He emphasises that the government does not wish to be involved in the administration or political affairs of non-British territories and that the aim is to withdraw British troops from these regions as soon as possible.

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Last updated: 01/03/2017

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FOREIGN OFFICE, S.W.1.

16th November, 1945.



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Dear Sidebotham,


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I am replying to your secret letter of the 14th November, in which you ask us for information as to His Majesty's Government's attitude in the matter of the Netherlands East Indies and French Indo China, so that the acting Chief Secretary may be able to intervene in the forthcoming debate on the subject in the Ceylon State Council.

His Majesty's Government's attitude has been defined in replies by the Prime Minister and my Secretary of State to parliamentary questions on the 17th and 24th October. In referring you to these replies, I would invite your attention in particular to the statement by the Prime Minister that His Majesty's Government do not desire to be unnecessarily involved in the administration or in the political affairs of non-British territories and that their object is to withdraw British troops as soon as circumstances permit; and, later, that the maintenance of law and order is essential to the fulfilment of the military tasks which arise out of the termination of the war with Japan and in particular to the safety of the several thousand Dutch nationals interned in the interior of Java.

We would suggest that the best general line to take is that British troops both in the Netherlands East Indies and in Indo China are fulfilling an Allied/

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Allied commitment to wind up the war with Japan in the area allocated to SACSEA under General MacArthur's General Order No. 1. Admiral Mountbatten clearly cannot tolerate conditions which prejudice the completion of this task and in Java has consequently had to take forcible measures to meet the force deployed by the Indonesian extremists. While there has undoubtedly been a genuine independence movement both in the Netherlands East Indies and Indo China for many years, the present activity is very largely the result of inspiration by the Japanese who in violation of the terms of surrender have in many cases handed over arms to the nationalists with the sole object of creating trouble for the Allied forces.

To speak of the bold fight which the nationalists are putting up against the Dutch and French imperialisms reveals a misconception of the situation. In both countries there is a diversity of races and it is the Dutch and the French who before the war brought unity order and economic welfare and development. The Queen of the Netherlands in her broadcast of December, 1942, promised a large degree of self-government to all Dutch overseas territories and Dr. van Mook, the Lieutenant Governor General of the Netherlands East Indies, has been authorised to discuss with the local Indonesian leaders how it is intended to apply these promised reforms in
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the case of Java. Similarly the French Government in a declaration of policy issued on the 24th March last, promised a wide measure of autonomy to Indo China. If the welfare and happiness of the inhabitants of the Netherlands East Indies and Indo China is not to be prejudiced, the ultimate aim of independence must be sought through a gradual and progressive evolution towards self-government which clearly demands the fullest possible cooperation between the local inhabitants and the Dutch and French Governments. Everyone who has the best interests of those inhabitants at heart must hope that the present period of disorders and violence will as soon as possible make way for an era of stable and peaceful conditions without which the Netherlands East Indies and Indo China cannot attain prosperity for themselves or make a valuable contribution to the re-habilitation of the world.

I hope that something on the above lines may meet your needs. Please, however, let me know if there are further particular points on which you would like more detailed guidance.

Yours sincerely,

J.C. Sterndale Bennett

(J.C. Sterndale Bennett)