

Telegram from Francis Shepherd to Ernest Bevin on the situation in the Dutch East Indies (Batavia, 13 November 1947)

Caption: On 13 November 1947, the British Consul-General in Batavia, Francis M. Shepherd, sends some notes on the political situation in the Dutch East Indies to the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin. He particularly mentions the creation by the United Nations Security Council of a Committee of Good Offices, which is set up to guide the future negotiations between the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia.

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Last updated: 01/03/2017

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SOUTH-EAST ASIA
November 25, 1947
Section 1

F 15569/45/62

Copy No. 150

POLITICAL SITUATION IN INDONESIA

Consul-General Shepherd to Mr. Bevin. (Received 25th November)

(No. 206. Secret) *Batavia,*
Sir, *13th November, 1947*

I have the honour to transmit herewith some notes by my information officer regarding the views held by the members of the press at Batavia about the present political situation.

2. The speculations regarding the activities of the Committee of Good Offices are perhaps not of great importance, but they do reflect the prevailing lack of confidence that the committee will succeed in securing a solution to the Indonesian problem. However much the Dutch may have resented the intrusion of the United Nations into their affairs in the East Indies there is little doubt that the interest taken by the Security Council in Indonesian affairs at the end of August, and the appointment of a consular commission which could be expected to start work immediately raised a number of hopes. There was in consequence a slightly better atmosphere during the period when the members of the consular commission were carrying out their investigations, and both sides made some effort to hold in check the prevailing tension. The delays in rendering the consular report and in appointing the members of the Committee of Good Offices caused a relaxation of public interest and this was not improved by the evident reluctance of both Dutch and Indonesians to commit themselves and by the long drawn-out negotiations over the comparatively minor point of a site for the conference. In consequence there exists at present a certain pessimism.

3. The feeling reported by Mr. Maclaren that the long-term policy of the Dutch is to allow the republic to disintegrate from within is gaining ground. It is very difficult to judge whether there is a good foundation for any such hope on the part of the Dutch. It seems to me that any Government placed in such a position as that of the republic, where it has had to face a loss of territory, difficult economic conditions and the apprehension of renewed attack must either tend to consolidate or disintegrate; it

cannot stand still. I have not yet been able to observe any tendencies towards disintegration, and the impressions I received during my two visits to Djocjakarta were rather to the contrary. Reliable information from the republican capital is, however, scarce and I am shy to give an opinion on the subject. It is true that there have been long drawn-out consultations between the present Cabinet and the members of the Masjoemi Party who wish to take part in the Government in order to be able to have an authoritative hand in the coming negotiations with the Dutch. I am reporting in a separate despatch the alterations in the Republican Cabinet which have now been made as a result of these consultations, but I am not clear whether the final result will be to strengthen or weaken the coalition. It will perhaps be necessary to await the formulation of a basis for discussion between Dutch and the Indonesians before this point can reasonably be ascertained.

4. The various speculations reported in Mr. Maclaren's memorandum, such as the possibility of the secession of Sumatra suggest that the republic is far from being a well-knit unit and that future developments will require watching.

A copy of this despatch is being sent to His Majesty's Special Commissioner in Singapore, His Majesty's Ambassador, The Hague, His Majesty's Ambassador, Washington, and the United Kingdom Delegation, New York.

I have &c.
F. M. SHEPHERD.

Enclosure

International press correspondents in close touch with Dutch and Republican leaders have formed the impression that there is little ground for optimism about the activities of the Commission of Good Offices. They regard the present position as one of deadlock, and point particularly to the fact that the Dutch have not formally

accepted the Security Council's resolution of 1st November.

The crux of the matter, according to these correspondents, seems to be acceptance or rejection of the ability or authority of the commission to issue directives. There appeared to be good arguments for supposing that the commission's powers were extended by the 1st November resolution, and it is clear that the republican authorities so thought. The republic accepted with an expected alacrity the commission's proposal that it should in effect arbitrate on demarcation lines and withdrawals. This is what the republic has wanted all along. The commission, gratified by this success, put a similar proposition to the N.F.I. Contact Group, which showed some surprise and a little indignation, and turned the proposal down flatly. Van Kleffens is said to have been instructed to concede nothing at Lake Success which would encourage anyone to believe that the Dutch were prepared to accept an extension of the commission's authority.

The newsmen's impression seems to be that at the moment delay favours the Dutch, and it is not believed that they are in any hurry to commit themselves to anything but expressions of vague goodwill. The change of heart required by Dr. van Mook of the Republicans is not considered to have come about. The fact that the Dutch have created a contact group, with no powers, and not a delegation in the sense applicable to the Republican representatives is taken as an indication that the Dutch are more concerned with the appearance of co-operation than with its realities.

It is believed by the correspondents that the long-term policy of the Dutch is to allow the republic to disintegrate from inside. As the republic weakens because of its internal disunity, more and more separatist movements will come into being. The Dutch will try to convince the international world that there is an essential absurdity in the position of the republic

and its exaggerated claims, which would damage the economic welfare of the archipelago as a whole. Dutch newspapermen of the Left subscribe to this interpretation of Dutch policy with reluctance, and those of the Right approve it.

On the question of fission movements within the republic, the rumour that Mohammed Hatta, Vice-President of the Republic, is about to set up an independent republic in Sumatra, has reached a stage when it must be taken seriously. The Dutch Reconba of the area near the scene of Hatta's operations in Sumatra has recently sent a full report on the matter to the Dutch authorities. Since Hatta arrived in Sumatra some months ago he appears to have had substantial success in organising the territory under his control. Contact with his Government in Jogja has gradually weakened, and Hatta is believed to be profoundly dissatisfied with the current activities of Jogja. He is a bitter opponent of the Masjoemi Party, and the imminence of the addition of Masjoemi leaders to the Republican Cabinet is said to have helped him to make up his mind to take independent action.

Sjahrir's tardy return to Indonesia is interpreted in various ways. Although Gani believed him to be on his way back, by way of India and Australia, there is a body of opinion that suggest that Sjahrir is taking a very long view, and is prepared to see the disintegration of the republic, to see the rise of the extreme Left, and its inevitable failure and then to return to power himself. This is not easy to reconcile with Sjahrir's character as revealed hitherto.

There are rumours from Republican areas that action with outside help by the Communist elements in the republic cannot be long delayed. There is vague talk of a coming *coup d'Etat*, but so nebulous that it does not rise above the level of gossip.

C. MACLAREN.