

# Indonesian independence

## response to Jasper van de Kerkhof

Letters

Jasper van de Kerkhof's article 'Dutch enterprises in independent Indonesia: cooperation and confrontation, 1949-1958' in *IIAS Newsletter 36* begins by outlining the aims of both sides at the 1949 Round Table Conference in the Hague. Preserving economic interests was the focus of the Dutch delegation. On the Indonesian side, the general opinion was that continued Dutch supremacy in Indonesia's economy was an intolerable relic of Dutch imperialism: political sovereignty should be followed by the realization of economic independence, the 'colonial economy' followed by the establishment of a 'national economy'. This is an objective description of the stand of both sides.

The article falls short by failing to analyse the role of the army in the 'takeover' from 'Indonesianization' to the 'nationalization' of foreign enterprises. Kerkhof oversees important events that took place in that period: the 'takeovers' of foreign companies were carried out by 'workers action' followed by legalization in parliament. The new president-directors, commissars and other leading personnel of the newly nationalized enterprises were mostly military officers of the Indonesian army, made possible by the 'emergency law' then in force. The military skilfully manipulated the situation, placing as many officers as possible in positions of political, economic and financial power. The armed forces have ever since been in big business - a further realization of the concept 'Dwifungsi ABRI' or the 'twin-function of the the armed forces'.

Another serious point concerns Kerkhof's dating of Indonesian independence. He writes: 'The independence of Indonesia was realized sometime between 1945 and 1949....' In fact he seems to regard the date The Hague recognized the independence of Indonesia as the date of independence. It must be noted that the RTC itself, attended by the head of the Indonesian delegation, Moh. Hatta, Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia and co-proclamator of independence, contributed to the confusion. Sukarno-Hatta proclaimed Indonesian independence on 17 August 1945. That the greater part of the territory of the Republic of Indonesia was still under Japanese, British or NICA occupation at the time does not change the facts. There is no difference with American independence day, when America declared herself free from the British Crown. At that time a part of America was still under British colonial rule, but American independence is accepted in history as the date when independence was proclaimed.

On their last official visit to Indonesia during the Suharto era, Queen Beatrix and Prince Claus of the Netherlands went shopping in Singapore instead of going straight to Jakarta, to avoid being present on Indonesian independence day, 17 August. It has since been disclosed that the Queen of the Kingdom of the Netherlands was about to apologize to the Indonesian people for the things Dutch colonial rule perpetrated on Indonesia. However, the government of the Netherlands was of another opinion; it was not yet ready to look at the historical facts. It is a great pity that a Dutch scientific research institution such as IIAS does not have the courage to accept Indonesian reality. <

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# response to Ibrahim Isa dari Bijlmer

The double role of the military (*dwinfungsi*) as guardian of Indonesia's territorial integrity and as a key element of the country's economic structure has indeed been a defining characteristic of independent Indonesia. The economic function of the Indonesian military had its roots in the revolutionary era (1945-49) but gained momentum after the expulsion of Dutch enterprise in 1957/58. Under Suharto's new order, the interlocking of economic and military power reached unprecedented levels. The role of the ABRI in the immediate aftermath of the takeover of Dutch firms, however, should not be exaggerated. Although the local military commanders after the workers' actions almost immediately took control of Dutch companies, day-to-day administration fell mostly on the few Indonesians who had already obtained staff positions under Dutch management. Also, a select number of Dutch managers continued to function as 'advisors' until in mid-1958 they too decided that there was no longer any future for them in Indonesia. After the takeovers and the formal nationalization of Dutch enterprise in December 1958, it became apparent that the military was the only organization with sufficient status and managerial capacity to run the expropriated Dutch firms. This, however, was a gradual process that was not completed until the early 1960s. It therefore falls outside the scope of my article.

The debate on the date of Indonesian independence reflects differences in the historiographical traditions of Indonesia and the Netherlands. The first dates Indonesian independence back to the Sukarno-Hatta *proklamasi* of 17 August 1945, whereas the latter argues that Indonesia only became independent after Dutch recognition of Indonesian sovereignty on 27 December 1949. Since the *Republic Indonesia* was party to the RTC-treaty that transferred sovereignty from the Netherlands to Indonesia, the confusion concerning Indonesia's date of independence is understandable. In general, the international literature supports the view that Indonesia's independent history began in 1945. Decolonization, however, is more than a change of flags. It is a protracted, complex and often painful process of emancipation of the former colony and withdrawal of the former mother country. Apart from the political dimension, this process also has cultural, socio-economic and often racial dimensions.

Accepting the Sukarno-Hatta *proklamasi* as the start of Indonesia's independent history, therefore, should not obscure the fact that the Dutch continued to dispute Indonesian sovereignty throughout the Revolutionary Period. This was not a triviality, since the Dutch occupied a large proportion of Indonesian territory, especially after their two large military operations in 1947 and 1948/49. Consequently, there were *de facto* limitations to Indonesian sovereignty in the Revolutionary Period.

My article deals with Dutch enterprise in independent Indonesia in the 1950s. Their (privileged) position was defined at the RTC (1949) which led to Dutch recognition of Indonesian sovereignty. It is therefore justifiable to regard the *transfer* of sovereignty in 1949, rather than its *proclamation* in 1945, as the starting point of an analysis of Dutch enterprise in independent Indonesia. In addition, there is little point in discussing the performance of Dutch companies in Republican-controlled areas in 1945-49 as they only resumed operations *after* the territories where they were located were restored to Dutch control as a result of the two military actions. <

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# Cambodians are Indigenous

In *IIAS Newsletter 35* of November 2004, p. 7, I found that UN Rapporteur Jose Martinez Cobo has proposed a definition of 'indigenous communities, peoples and nations' which holds that they 'form at present non-dominant sectors of society'. Cobo's definition seems to leave out Cambodians (Khmer). Yet Cambodians regard themselves as the original inhabitants of their country, as can be seen in their story, 'The Daughter of the Naga King' in which the king (a seven-headed cobra) drinks sea water from a gulf to create a land for the couple that would be the ancestors of the Khmer.

On the other hand, the Khmer minority in Vietnam (the Khmer Krom) would be indigenous under the Cobo definition, since their condition is the result of Vietnam's historical southward expansion at the expense of Champa and Cambodia, countries influenced by India rather than China (see: Michael G. Cotter, 'Toward a Social History of the Vietnamese Southward Movement', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Vol. 9, No. 1, March 1968). In reality, Khmer on either side of the Cambodia-Vietnam border are part of the same nation or ethnic group. Vietnam's expansion continues today in the form of ethnic Vietnamese settlers in Cambodia. <

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## Feature #37 China's new pride

In just two decades a socialist economy-turned-capitalist has increased China's international clout, first economically and now militarily and politically (van Kemenade p.5). But what will happen when the resources that fuel growth become scarce? (Amineh p.6)

At home economic growth has spawned an equally fast-growing middle class, proud of China's new power position. The Party encourages this pride and uses it to legitimize its rule. It gives rise to cultural nationalism that shows in new literature (Yue p.7), while both government and people see China as a power that has much to offer the world (Wang p.8).

The new middle class, however, has its own demands which increasingly go beyond economic consumption, creating a paradox: free market economy without political freedom, emerging civil society without freedom of press (Ho & Richardson p.9; Abels p.10). Be proud of China but don't question the power that made it possible. Is there a limit to the life span of such a paradox? <

**Natasja Kershof**