

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

TOP SECRET

FOR CABINET (For Information)

NETHERLANDS NEW GUINEA

At the end of November, 1960, the State Department informally and secretly sought our views on the idea of a Trusteeship for Netherlands New Guinea administered by the United Nations itself. They said the approach was exclusively to Australia.

2. The dispute over the territory was in the American view a real danger to the peace and their own position of neutrality:

- (a) impeded the attraction of Indonesia towards the West;
- (b) disappointed the Dutch and had led them to limit their contribution to NATO.

3. The idea of a Trusteeship although advanced only tentatively was clearly of the greatest importance to Australia; but I thought, that even if convinced we could not commit ourselves before President Kennedy's inauguration.

4. After consultation with Ministers most closely affected, and with our Ambassador to the United States who was here, I decided that, our initial response should show objective interest, should temporize and point to the problems.

5. Accordingly our Embassy in Washington was instructed on January 6th to reply to the State Department in the following terms:

- (a) Our Ambassador would be able on his return to Washington to pursue the matter with the new Secretary of State.
- (b) The Government could not give a definitive view without having a more detailed idea of the United States conception; there would be no objection, however, to discussion on a non-committal basis between officers of our Embassy and State Department of the political and technical problems as we say them.
- (c) The fact that such discussions were taking place should not be revealed to any other government.

6. In these discussions we have pointed to certain major difficulties arising from the terms of the United Nations Charter and from practical problems of government in Netherlands New Guinea. It seems, in fact, most unlikely that good government could be ensured under any scheme acceptable to a majority of the United Nations as now composed.

- (a) The General Assembly has in the past considered and rejected proposals for trusteeship administered by the United Nations itself (e.g. Libya)
- (b) Whatever United Nations organ (or the Secretary General himself) acted as Administrator, the General Assembly would have the right to interfere. Such interference, on political and other grounds,

would be likely to prejudice both the efficiency and integrity of the administration to the detriment of the interests of the inhabitants.

- (c) The composition of the United Nations organ charged with the routine supervision and control of the United Nations administration would no doubt lead to the same result.
- (d) Experienced administrators are available only from "colonial" powers. The Indonesians and their supporters would not be likely to tolerate their use.
- (e) The problem of financing the operation would be serious. At the level of present requirements (which will increase considerably in the near future) about one half of the present total United Nations Budget would be required.
- (f) Other major practical and legal difficulties would arise in the fields of defence, internal security, language, citizenship, immigration and education.

7. We have also drawn the attention of the United States to certain major policy considerations including:

- (a) Our view that the existence of the Netherlands New Guinea dispute does not decisively influence the prospects of communist success in Indonesia and is not the only significant obstacle to Indonesian-Western co-operation.
- (b) In the United Nations Communists and Afro-Asians will support an extreme Indonesian position and this will tempt the Indonesians to manufacture incidents with the Dutch. There would be little prospect of attaining genuine guarantees of self-determination under a new trust agreement; but once the Dutch had launched the proposal in the United Nations there would be little prospect of withdrawing.
- (c) A United Nations administration would expose all New Guinea to Communist influence and to increase Asian and anti-Western influence, thus prejudicing the future of the South West Pacific.
- (d) Our defence interest in Netherlands New Guinea in terms of the status of the territory in war and the availability of bases there to use or to an enemy was involved.

8. On his return to Washington at the end of January, Beale discussed West New Guinea with the new Secretary of State. Rusk said that the administration had not yet developed a policy on the issue; a basic United States consideration would seem to be that a solution to the problem should involve self-determination; the stakes were very high in Indonesia; and the United States would not wish to inflame passions there. Mr. Rusk added that Western policy had failed to produce a solution; that it might be necessary to consider new policies; and that a trusteeship resting on self-determination would be the strongest political solution which might be obtainable. He was not prepared to say more before consulting President Kennedy

R.G. Menzies

6th February, 1961

[rbf's note - Decision No. 1184, 6 February 1961 on Submission No. 991 reads: "The Prime Minister circulated this submission for the information of the Cabinet."