

## **The Department of External Affairs, the ABC and Reporting of the Indonesian Crisis 1965-1969**

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The Department of External Affairs took a keen interest in the manner in which Radio Australia reported events in Indonesia throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Radio Australia's high signal strength gave it a massive listening audience in the region. The attempted coup in Indonesia of 1965, its immediate aftermath, and the protracted power struggle that followed, triggered a period of cooperation and conflict between the Department and the Australian Broadcasting Commission over Radio Australia's reporting of events in Indonesia. During this time the Department received and acted upon advice from the Australian ambassador to Indonesia, Keith Shann, and, via Shann, received advice from the Indonesian Army on how it wanted the situation in Indonesia reported. This period is characterised by the Department's efforts to take over Radio Australia, and by cooperation between major western powers to coordinate information policy towards Indonesia. The Department also attempted to influence reporting of events in Indonesia by the Australian press and succeeded in convincing newspaper editors to report and editorialise in a manner sensitive to the Department's concerns.

“Our aim [...] is not to be impartial for the sake of impartiality but to have the appearance of impartiality so that the message we want to deliver will be delivered successfully.” Paul Hasluck, Australian Minister for External Affairs, 4 June 1965.<sup>1</sup>

“The Army's anti-PKI campaign has developed very well so far, but in a different way from what was expected by almost all foreign observers, and too much dash could get us into difficult positions. The approach should be to play down the aspects which we do not wish to be promoted, eg Sukarno, Subandrio, rather than to attack them”. Keith Shann, Australian Ambassador to Indonesia on the reporting of the attempted coup in Indonesia by Radio Australia. 2 December 1965.<sup>2</sup>

### **Radio Australia and the ABC's difficult relations with External Affairs**

Relations between the Department of External Affairs and the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) were at times severely tested by the latter's reporting of the attempted coup in Indonesia and its aftermath in the period between 1965 and 1969. These tensions, predictably, grew out of interference in the ABC's reporting of the Indonesian situation by the Department of External Affairs. In this period, the

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<sup>1</sup> Memorandum to The Secretary, Department Of External Affairs, Canberra, from Paul Hasluck, 4 June 1965. National Archives of Australia: A1838/2, 555/1/9/1 Part 1. “Australian Information Policy-Indonesia-Conference with United States”.

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum number 1569 to The Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra from Keith Shann, Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, 2 December 1965. NAA: A1838/273, 570/7/9 Part 3. “Radio Australia-Posts-Relations with Indonesia”.

Department of External Affairs attempted continually to influence Radio Australia's reporting and commentary on Indonesia. The Department exercised "guidance" and even threatened to take over the running of Radio Australia (RA) if it was not more amenable to the Department's view. These efforts to guide RA highlight Australia's foreign policy aims and objectives towards Indonesia, the extent to which the Department was prepared to go to implement these and the primary importance Canberra placed on them.

Relations between the ABC management, RA personnel and the Department of External Affairs immediately prior to, and following, the attempted coup, were especially strained when attempts were made to place RA firmly under the control of the Department, and to coordinate information policy towards Indonesia with Canberra's major western allies. This attempt to control was spurred by events in Indonesia and the realisation of the Australian and western governments that RA's high signal strength and massive listening audience in the archipelago (including the highest echelons of power in Indonesia) was a resource that should be exploited wisely and cooperatively.<sup>3</sup> Throughout this period, the Department of External Affairs also intervened on a number of occasions to influence reporting of Indonesian issues in the commercial media. There are indications that this was not a widespread practice prior to 1965.

When RA was placed under the control of the ABC in 1950s its relationship with the Department of External Affairs was difficult. External Affairs saw RA's news broadcasts to Indonesia as unsympathetic to its views of, and policies towards, Indonesia.<sup>4</sup> In 1957 the Department's dismay at RA's reporting of the West Irian dispute was registered as an official complaint by External Affairs Minister Richard Casey to the Postmaster-General, Charles Davidson. The complaint concerned a comment by the Indonesian delegate to the United Nations, Ali Sastroamidjojo, on the West Irian issue that Casey felt was "unnecessarily loaded in favour of the Indonesian case".<sup>5</sup> Casey made a further complaint in January 1958 about RA's reporting of the Permesta (PRRI) rebellion in Sumatra.<sup>6</sup>

The Department was also highly critical of individual RA commentators who caused continuing contention between the ABC and the Department. From 1960 to 1965 several RA commentators were either dismissed or resigned in response to pressure from the Department to "toe the party line" or to "compromise" with the Department in their commentaries on Indonesian affairs. A former RA commentator, Douglas Wilkie, stated "[it] (conflicts with the Department about commentaries) had always ended in a compromise in their favour or in my surrender".<sup>7</sup> The problem here, according to Hodge, was that RA was attempting to use men of the highest intellectual calibre<sup>8</sup> to merely "parrot" Government policy.<sup>9</sup> The Department of External Affairs had been

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<sup>3</sup> A good example of this can be seen in the desire of United States diplomats expelled from Indonesia in 1965 to use Radio Australia to convey messages to their audiences in Indonesia. See Errol Hodge, *Radio Wars: Truth, Propaganda and the Struggle for Radio Australia* (Cambridge, 1995) p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Such figures included Sir Herman Black, Creighton Burns and Zelman Cowan. See Hodge, *Radio Wars*, p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

given a special role in the operations of RA established during the Second World War<sup>10</sup> and was entitled to “liaise” with the ABC over reporting and commentary. The Commonwealth Government in June 1961 reaffirmed this role.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, many ABC staff (particularly commentators) resented what they saw as departmental interference in RA’s reporting of Indonesian affairs.<sup>12</sup>

It had been Commonwealth Government policy since the Second World War to consider short wave overseas radio broadcasts as a means of propagating Government views. Consequently it was placed under the Minister for Information’s authority. This decision was given force in a memorandum for Cabinet by the then Postmaster-General dated 25 July 1945: “In accordance with a directive issued by the late Prime Minister, short wave broadcasting was placed under the authority of the Minister for Information in respect of matters of administration, while conduct of political warfare and propaganda was made the responsibility of the Minister for External Affairs.”<sup>13</sup>

A “short-wave division” was created in the Department of External Affairs and became the chief executive organisation for political warfare and propaganda in Australia.<sup>14</sup> As Hodge demonstrates, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, there was an almost tug-of-war between the Department of External Affairs who sought to use Radio Australia as an instrument of Cold War political warfare and those in the ABC (most notably ABC Chairmen Richard Boyer and James Darling and ABC journalists Walter Hamilton and John Hall) who fought to retain Radio Australia’s editorial independence.<sup>15</sup> The authority of the Minister for External Affairs over RA in areas of foreign policy and propaganda was upheld in a Cabinet submission in 1963 which recommended the construction of a booster station to increase RA’s signal strength relative to other short wave services in the Southeast Asian region, enabling it to compete with both friendly (BBC, Voice of America, Radio Malaysia) and unfriendly (Radio Peking, Radio Hanoi, Radio Pyongyang) broadcasters in the region.<sup>16</sup> The recommendations for funding of the project were approved in their entirety by the Commonwealth Cabinet and with additional funding in a Cabinet Decision made on 6 August 1963.<sup>17</sup>

The belated and over-budget construction of the booster station at Cox Peninsula in the Northern Territory in 1965 reflected a move in the early 1960s by the Commonwealth Government to increase Australian short wave radio services to Southeast Asia. This was intensified during the period 1964-1965 and following the

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<sup>10</sup> Agendum number 897. Memorandum for Cabinet, “World-Range Radio Broadcasting from Australia”. By D. Cameron, Postmaster-General, 25 July 1945. National Archives of Australia: A4940/1, C1344. “Radio Australia-Policy”.

<sup>11</sup> Cabinet Minute. Dated Melbourne, 22 June 1961. Decision number 1408. Submission number 1161. “Radio Australia booster Station”. By Sir John Bunting. NAA: A4940/1, C1344. “Radio Australia-Policy”.

<sup>12</sup> A case in point is the controversy and acrimony surrounding the departure from the ABC of Creighton Burns. See Hodge *Radio Wars*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>13</sup> Agendum number 897. Memorandum for Cabinet “World Range Radio Broadcasting from Australia”. By D. Cameron, Postmaster General, 25 July 1945. National Archives of Australia: A4940/1, C1344. “Radio Australia Policy”.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Hodge, *Radio Wars*, p. ix.

<sup>16</sup> Cabinet Submission number 751. “Radio Australia Booster Station”, by Sir Garfield Barwick and C.W. Davidson, 3rd July 1963. NAA: A4940/1, C1344. “Radio Australia-Policy”.

<sup>17</sup> Cabinet Minute, Canberra, 6 August 1963. Decision number 957, Submission number 751. “Radio Australia Booster Station”. NAA: A4940/1, C1344. “Radio Australia-Policy”.

attempted coup of October 1965. This development had as three related objectives the upgrading of short wave broadcasting facilities in Australia to the immediate north; an increase in general and foreign language programming with a heavy slant towards Indonesia, and the tightening of bureaucratic control over Radio Australia's reporting and commentary of events in Indonesia and those pertaining to the relationship between Indonesia and Australia.

It would be wrong to assert that following the attempted coup in 1965 the Department of External Affairs, and Australian diplomats in Jakarta, suddenly became sensitive to the potential damage done by reporting and commentary by a RA not attuned to the concerns of the Australian Government. These sensitivities had earlier heightened following Sukarno's assumption of near dictatorial powers under the mantle of "Guided Democracy" (when Indonesia's constitutionally democratic government was replaced by an authoritarian system of government based on the 1945 constitution rather than the provisional 1950 constitution and in which Sukarno was both President and Prime Minister). For example, the reporting by RA of an attempt on Sukarno's life during a trip to Macassar (Ujung Pandang), South Sulawesi, in early 1962 brought criticism from the Indonesian Foreign Ministry of Pro-Dutch bias. Alex Alatas, then a public information officer with the Indonesian Foreign Ministry, expressed concern that Radio Australia would carry the "wrong type of propaganda".<sup>18</sup> (He later changed his name to Ali and became Foreign Minister.) Prior to the attempted coup, and in the same month that he suggested that RA report Sukarno as "the father of the revolution" who was "being misled by a bunch of crooks in comfortable houses and big cars",<sup>19</sup> the Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, Keith Shann, expressed concern that broadcasts considered by Indonesia to be insulting were compounding the difficulties he was encountering over the West Irian dispute and complained to the Department. It responded that "we have been in much closer contact with Radio Australia in an effort to ensure treatment of news items stories which would support government policy".<sup>20</sup> In a conversation with Paul Hasluck on 28 April 1965 Shann stated that some things RA did irritated him and that it was in need of "more expert and knowledgable direction".<sup>21</sup> Citing RA's massive listening audience in Indonesia, Shann suggested to Hasluck the benefits to be gained by co-operation in the area of information policy with the United States, and advised Hasluck to raise the issue with Dean Rusk at a meeting in London.<sup>22</sup> Shann's wish to control Radio Australia reflected his understanding that it had a vast listening audience throughout the archipelago where its signal strength was often much stronger than local stations.

### **RA coverage of the 1965 attempted coup in Indonesia**

Late in the night of 30 September 1965, six of the Indonesian Army's leading generals were murdered by elements of the Indonesian army and PKI cadres operating under the authority of Lieutenant Colonel Untung, an obscure officer in the Palace Guard, seized strategic points in Jakarta. The following day, a group calling itself the GESTAPU

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<sup>18</sup> Hodge, *Radio Wars*, p.169.

<sup>19</sup> Inward Cablegram number 555 from Shann to External Affairs, Canberra. Dated and received 4 May 1965. NAA: A6364/4, JA1965/03. "Jakarta Cables Inwards Chronological, numbers 400-799, 25th March to 5th July 1965".

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.175.

<sup>21</sup> "Notes on Conversation with Mr KCO Shann at Jakarta on April 28th 1965", by Paul Hasluck. NAA: A1838/280, 3034/2/1 Part 46. "Indonesia-Political-General".

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

(Gerakan September Tiga Pulu or the Thirtieth of September Movement) announced the formation of a revolutionary council headed by Untung that would assume control of the Government. However this attempted coup was crushed within a matter of days by troops loyal to General Suharto.<sup>23</sup> In its wake Shann forwarded advice to RA through cables to External Affairs in Canberra on which Canberra relied heavily. His advice was to maximise the propaganda value of RA's popularity by emphasising the following points in broadcasts:

1. That reports of PKI involvement and Communist Chinese complicity in the coup be given prominent coverage whilst being careful not to directly accuse them.
2. That reports of divisions within the army specifically and armed services more generally be played down or simply not reported.
3. In the period immediately following the coup, Sukarno's loss of authority should not be reported, but the possibility of his retaining power should be downplayed.
4. The complete neutrality and non-involvement of Australia in the events unfolding in Indonesia.

Although the PKI and Communist China were implicated in the attempted coup and bore some responsibility for it, evidence for it is largely circumstantial.<sup>24</sup> It was in the interest of Canberra, other western nations and the Indonesian army to see the coup as an attempted Communist seizure of power,<sup>25</sup> and Shann believed RA should report it thus — with qualification. His message to Canberra on 2 October was: "I agree that restrained comments on PKI involvement is most useful [*sic*], and suggest that you keep at this continuously".<sup>26</sup> In the same cablegram Shann suggests, "[...] you might well mention that there have been suggestions of Chinese involvement in newspapers here".<sup>27</sup> This theme was echoed by D.O. Hay, a First Assistant Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, who recommended to the Minister for Information that: "Radio Australia should, by careful selection of its news items, not do anything which would be helpful to the PKI and should highlight reports tending to discredit the PKI and show its involvement in the losing cause of the 30th September Movement."<sup>28</sup> Hay also argued that RA present "Well-sourced reports of evidence of the association

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<sup>23</sup> For a more thorough treatment of the attempted coup see John Hughes, *The End of Sukarno: A Coup that Misfired: A Purge that ran Wild* (London, 1968). See also Leslie Palmier, "The 30th September Movement in Indonesia", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 5, no. 1 (1971).

<sup>24</sup> This is reflected in Hasluck's cautious criticism of Peking's actions and statements following the coup. On 28 April 1966 Hasluck stated in the House: "Peking, by statements it has made over its radio [...] has made clear [...] that it firmly supported the Indonesian Communist Party (and) it has made clear that it disapproved of those who took action to defeat the coup". CPD, H of R, Vol. 51 p. 1270. See also Inward Savingram no. 51 from Australian Embassy, Jakarta, 8 October 1965. NAA: A1838/280, 3034/2/1/8 Part 1. "Indonesia-Political-Coup d'Etat of October 1965". There is also a thorough treatment of the attempted coup in Harold Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1978).

<sup>25</sup> This can be seen in Hasluck's description of the attempted coup as "[...] the unsuccessful attempt at a communist takeover". See CPD (Hansard) House of Representatives, Volume 55, p. 2140.

<sup>26</sup> Cablegram number 1182 from Shann to External Affairs, Canberra. Dated and received 7 October 1965. NAA: A1838/273, 570/7/9 Part 3. "Radio Australia-Posts-Relations with Indonesia".

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Submission for the Minister for Information by DO Hay. Subject, "Radio Australia-Handling of Indonesian Situation". 18th October 1965. NAA: A1838/273, 570/7/9 Part 3. "Radio Australia-Posts-Relations with Indonesia".

of Communist China in the movement or criticism of China by the Indonesian Government and Army [...].<sup>29</sup>

Until the drama of the attempted coup had settled and its effects on the authority of Sukarno could be established, it was felt by Shann and the Department that it would be premature to play up in any way any loss of power or authority of Sukarno. Believing that it was far from certain that Sukarno wouldn't be able to manipulate events and forces to his advantage and remain President, but nonetheless hoping to preclude this from happening, Shann recommended: "Could I suggest that Radio Australia play down the idea of re-imposition of Sukarno's control? Army control yes, but control of the civilian government, no".<sup>30</sup> Concerned to play down divisions within the army and between the different services that could give the impression of impending civil war, Shann and the Department sought to project an image of a united army working in tandem with the other three services to deal with the communist menace. To this end, Shann advised that: "There is some inter-service jealousy in Indonesia. We should encourage the idea that the Armed Forces are engaged in the present anti-communist drive".<sup>31</sup> In a memorandum to the Secretary, Shann noted, "[...] anti-PKI action could best be presented as being undertaken by the Armed Forces (rather than just the Army) together with political parties and other civilian organisations. Anything which shows the Army working together with the non-communist political parties in a limited front against the communists would be useful".<sup>32</sup>

The most important of all imperatives for Shann was Australia's non-interference in the unfolding events in this internal Indonesian affair. He believed that this position offered the Indonesian Army the greatest prospect for gaining control. Any perceived interference from Australia or any western country would have been exploited by Sukarno as a NEKOLIM (neo-colonialist) plot to weaken Indonesia. Shann advised, "I assume you will be most careful to stress the essential internal nature of these events and our absolute non-acceptance of involvement. To take or even imply the taking of sides except with the greatest subtlety will hurt the people we want to help (ie the Army)".<sup>33</sup>

Australian information policy towards Indonesia in the months following the attempted coup was ideologically directed and designed to assist the Army under General Suharto to assume power throughout the country. Shann's and the Department's "advice" to RA represented a cultivated sensitivity to the Army. This sensitivity is illustrated in a cable from Shann to the Department in which Shann described how an officer from the information section of the Indonesian Army had told him of the way the Army preferred RA to report events in Indonesia. The Army's complaint about Australian reporting, according to Shann, was that "we should not concentrate on them so much".<sup>34</sup> The Army also requested the following:

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Cablegram from Shann to External Affairs, Canberra. Dated and received 7 October 1965.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* Cablegram from Shann to External Affairs, Canberra. 4 November 1965.

<sup>32</sup> Memorandum number 1569 to The Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra from K.C.O. Shann. Subject, "Radio Australia". 2 December 1965. NAA: A1838/273, 570/7/9 Part 3. "Radio Australia-Posts-Relations with Indonesia".

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* Shann to EA, Canberra. 7 October 1965.

<sup>34</sup> Cablegram number 1340 from Shann to External Affairs, Canberra. Dated 5 November 1965, received 8 November 1965. NAA: A1838/280, 3034/2/1/8 Part 1. "Indonesia-Political-Coup d'Etat of October 1965".

- That the Army not be portrayed as acting alone against the PKI but with cooperation and support from youth groups, both Christian and Moslem.
- That RA suggest that, over the years, at least some people on the anti-communist anti-Sukarno side of Indonesian politics had had some limited success.
- RA should not describe the Army as “Western” or “rightist”.

Shann’s cablegram concluded, “I can live with most of this, even if we have to be a bit dishonest for a while”.<sup>35</sup>

The Department seemed to share Shann’s concerns for RA in this period. This is evinced in a letter from Gordon Jockel, Acting Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, to Shann. He wrote, “You might let me know personally whether there are any problems with the ABC representative in Jakarta. Here again, I think we can, if necessary, steer Radio Australia in the right course even if the ABC man in Jakarta is not entirely with us”.<sup>36</sup> A good example of Shann taking instructions from the Indonesian Army regarding how RA was reporting them occurred in March 1966. Shann cabled Canberra criticising the commentary and reportage of some of RA’s most prominent journalists and commentators, including Zelman Cowan, Alan Nicholls, and a report filed by the ABC’s Tony Canes. Shann criticised a commentary by Cowan and Nicholls broadcast on RA on 15 March 1966 in which they commented on Indonesia’s policy of “Confrontation” against the Malaysian Federation and expressed the view that “they (the Indonesians) must not waste their substance on confronting Malaysia if they expect help”.<sup>37</sup> The ABC’s Tony Cane’s “no doubt unvetted report” of 15 March on RA was described by Shann as “inaccurate, provocative, and very unhelpful to the Army”.<sup>38</sup> He also reported a consultation with an unnamed Indonesian Government Minister (for whom Shann expressed “the highest of respect”) during which Shann had been counselled that RA “not ‘comment’ on what is going on, or offer admonition or advice”.<sup>39</sup> Such advice was intended to further Australian and Western desires to see Sukarno removed from office and to end high level Chinese communist influence in Indonesia. Shann felt that if Canberra was seen to be too much in favour of an Army-led regime, this might encourage Peking and residual communist groups in Indonesia to exploit what would appear as a concerted western campaign to remove Sukarno and call on their supporters in Indonesia to resist the new regime. As Shann resignedly commented, “If we show any signs of welcoming this, as the State Department has done, announcing that aid will follow change (in the Indonesia leadership), we may well help the bad forces in this country to turn the clock back towards China more quickly than the general laziness, deviousness, and capacity for self-delusion of any Indonesian regime will, in due course, without doubt achieve”.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Gordon Jockel to Shann, 15 October 1965. NAA: 1838/280, 3034/2/1/8 Part 2. “Indonesia-Political-Coup d’Etat of October 1965”.

<sup>37</sup> Inward Cablegram number 304 from Shann to External Affairs Canberra. Dated 16 March 1966, received 17 March 1966. NAA: A1838/273, 570/7/9 Part 3. “Radio Australia-Posts-Relations with Indonesia”.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

### Hasluck's attempts to control Radio Australia

The attempted coup and Shann's subsequent efforts to influence RA coverage of events in Indonesia occurred during a period of turmoil between the Department of External Affairs and the ABC. The fight for control of RA began in earnest when Paul Hasluck was appointed Minister for External Affairs in 1964. Hasluck soon became frustrated with RA's reporting and commentary on Indonesia and regularly complained to the ABC about Radio Australia's coverage as either being inaccurate or damaging to the national interest.<sup>41</sup> In 1965 he attempted to separate RA from the ABC and have External Affairs and the Postmaster General's Department jointly control the broadcaster.<sup>42</sup> His reasons for wanting this are revealed in a letter by Hasluck dated October 1965, in which he wrote: "What is required is that the Government should have the authority, through The Secretary of my Department, to direct the Australian Broadcasting Commission as to the contents of its news services, to the end that Radio Australia would not have the right to broadcast, unless in an approved form, any item which bears directly on the conduct of Australian foreign relations in Asia [...]."<sup>43</sup>

Hasluck's move to separate RA and place it under the control of his department was successfully resisted by ABC management (whose Board Chairman threatened to resign if the separation occurred).<sup>44</sup> Although rebuffed on this occasion, Hasluck in 1966 then raised the possibility of running RA as the United States State Department ran the Voice of America. According to this proposal, RA would be separated from the ABC but left independent in its daily operations, with the Department controlling its policy.<sup>45</sup> Hasluck's hopes failed due to Departmental Secretary James Plimsoll's refusal to support them.<sup>46</sup> On the face of things it could appear that the Department and not the ABC was the villain in this row. The question at issue here is to what extent is it reasonable for a Government to be able to use its own broadcaster to deliver its point of view to the world, in particular to countries such as Indonesia, whose political movements have a direct bearing on Australia's strategic position? Such a view was expressed well by Plimsoll's predecessor as Secretary of the Department, Arthur Tange, who stated somewhat bluntly, "[...] there was no point in being 'objective'; Asians would prefer to get the Australians Government line [*sic*] [...] the commentaries should be unashamedly by official Australian Government spokesmen, so that listeners would know what our policies were [...]."<sup>47</sup> This was also the view shared by Hasluck, who was opposed to official Australian Government views on events in Indonesia being expressed second hand by the ABC quoting newspaper journalists. Hasluck considered: "When we are giving the view of the Australian Government why do we not give it clearly and plainly in the name of someone

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<sup>41</sup> Hodge, *Radio Wars*, p. 80.

<sup>42</sup> Under Hasluck's proposal, External Affairs would be responsible for policy and the Postmaster General's Department would be responsible for its administration. See Hodge, *Radio Wars*, p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> Hodge, *Radio Wars*, p. 87.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> According to Richard Woolcott, then Public Information Officer of the Department notes that Hasluck had asked Plimsoll to write a submission on the feasibility of the Department taking over Radio Australia sometime in 1967. Plimsoll simply never wrote the submission and Hasluck never raised the issue again. Plimsoll described this as "inertia policy". See Hodge, *Radio Wars*, p. 90. Granted Hasluck's thoroughness and dedication to his tasks, it is reasonable to submit that Hasluck himself wasn't enthusiastic about the proposal.

<sup>47</sup> Hodge, *Radio Wars*, p. 112.

authorised to speak for the Australian Government, and why do we not use the official version instead of relying on some garbled account by a newspaper correspondent?"<sup>48</sup>

The Department attempted other ways to assert control over RA's Indonesian reporting. In 1966, D.O Hay, a first Assistant Secretary at the Department of External Affairs, presented Hasluck with a submission for the creation of a new position in the Public Information Section of the Department of External Affairs of "Radio Australia Liaison Officer". Hay believed there was a lack of guidance from the Department to RA about its Indonesian service. The new position would rectify a lack of "informed selection of points to emphasize in broadcasts of Australian policy statements: quick and informed judgements in news from Indonesia which can be played back to Indonesia on Radio Australia; the injection of news items by the Department in the form of relevant third party statements, e.g. on events in Indonesia (which would enable us to express a useful point of view which would be unacceptable coming from an Australian source)."<sup>49</sup> The liaison officer's duties would include, "The preparation of guide lines for Radio Australia on current matters of importance in the field of foreign affairs"<sup>50</sup> and "assisting Radio Australia with advice on the selection and presentation of official comment on news items and advice on selection and presentation of Radio Australia commentaries".<sup>51</sup> This was Hay's second submission on this topic to Hasluck: his first proposal took the form of an Executive Council Minute. Hasluck rejected Hay's initial proposal because he was "[...] completely sceptical about the possibility of obtaining any improvement by this method. We have failed to get satisfactory liaison and all you are proposing is to intensify the methods that you have already found unsuccessful".<sup>52</sup> The second submission was also rejected because, in earlier discussions, RA had agreed to accept Departmental advice on reporting and commentary of sensitive issues.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, evidence suggests that Hay himself did not believe that difficulties the Department were experiencing in its relationship with the ABC were significantly affecting the quality of RA reporting and commentary of Indonesia in the Department's view. Shann appears to have concurred with this view. This is revealed in a departmental memorandum to the Minister for Information from Hay dated 18 October 1965 in which he states: "Bearing in mind the difficulties facing Radio Australia and the Department in guiding Radio Australia within the framework of liaison which is still in fact being evolved between the Department and the ABC, Radio Australia's handling of the situation has been quite good. Mr Shann originally described it as 'admirable' and more recently as 'generally good'."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Memorandum to Secretary, Department of External Affairs from the Minister. Dated 4 June 1965. NAA: A1838/2, 3034/10/18/1. "Indonesia-Relations with Australia-Indonesian Reactions to Radio Australia Commentaries".

<sup>49</sup> Submission for the Minister from DO Hay. "Liaison with Radio Australia". No Date. NAA: A1838/1, 570/1/3 Part 7. "Radio Australia-Commentaries-Pamphlets".

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Hodge, *Radio Wars*, p. 84.

<sup>54</sup> Memorandum for the Minister for Information from D.O. Hay, First Assistant Secretary, Department of External Affairs 18 October 1965. NAA: A1838/273, 570/7/9 Part 3. 'Radio Australia-Posts-Relations with Indonesia'.

### The 1965 Indonesian crisis and information policy

Following the 1965 Indonesian crisis, two major developments occurred in information policy and practice. A more concerted attempt was made to coordinate information policy with the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand through the first “Four Power Conference on Information Activities in Southeast Asia and Oceania” held in Canberra on 14 and 15 of November 1966. An Australian working paper submitted at this meeting analysed recent events in Indonesia and their implications for Western information activities in Indonesia. It urged that Western information policy in Indonesia should avoid policies “[...] aimed at rendering Indonesia politically impotent”, stressed the non-threatening nature of the Western military presence in South East Asia and emphasized “prudently and with discretion, the importance of democratic values in nation-building”.<sup>55</sup> It also mentioned the need to discourage anti-Chinese policies because of the contributions to the Indonesian economy made by resident Chinese and to avoid the impression of a special connection between Western countries and the Indonesian Chinese.<sup>56</sup> One implication of this paper was that Australian policy imperatives towards Indonesia applied equally to the other Western powers. Australia sought to maximise its objectives by subsuming them in a larger western policy framework.

Throughout this period, Canberra sought to increase the volume of Indonesian language programming carried by RA. A 1966 briefing paper entitled “Australian Information Policy Towards Indonesia” recommended increasing RA broadcasts in Indonesian. The aim of this was to increase overall hours of transmission and consider ways in which Indonesian television could be exploited.<sup>57</sup> A proposal listing all of RA’s foreign language services recommended increasing hours of broadcasting in Indonesian from five to sixteen and a half hours with more modest expansions in other language services. It noted that all foreign language services were taped and examined by expert translators at the Point Cook School of languages “as a deterrent to distorted translation or presentation”.<sup>58</sup>

Department of External Affairs attempts to control and influence Indonesian reporting and commentary were not restricted to RA and the ABC. On at least three occasions the Department sought to influence, through various means, reporting and commentary on Indonesia by the Australian press. The difficulty for the Department in this regard was that the Indonesian Government would often hold the Australian Government responsible for articles and editorials appearing in major metropolitan Australian newspapers which the Indonesian Government found offensive. Such a case occurred in late 1965 soon after the attempted coup. The Indonesian Ambassador, Lieutenant General R.A. Kosasih, in an interview with the Departmental Secretary, Sir Lawrence McIntyre, complained about reporting of Sukarno in the Australian press. McIntyre records, “He asked why it was that the Australian press seemed to be going out of its way to be critical of President Sukarno at this time. I said that I had not

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<sup>55</sup> Working Paper entitled “Indonesia. Working Paper submitted by Australian Delegation to the Four Power Conference on Information Activities in South East Asia and Oceania”, Canberra 14th to 15th November 1966. No date, No Author. NAA: A1838/280, 3034/2/1 Part 52. “Indonesia-Political-General”.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> “Australian Information policy Towards Indonesia”. No date, no author. NAA: A1838/2, 555/1/9 Part 2. “Information-Australian Publicity Policy-Indonesia”.

<sup>58</sup> “Radio Australia: Programmes, and Present and Projected Services”. No date, no Author. NAA: A4359/13, 251/15. “Jakarta-ABC (includes Radio Australia, ABC Board etc)”.

noticed any particular criticisms of the President; the press was bound to devote a good deal of space to Sukarno with Indonesia currently; Sukarno, as he must recognise, was a public figure around the world [...] and a controversial one at that [...] I reminded General Kosasih of the free-ranging criticism to which our own ministers were subject in the Australian press.”<sup>59</sup>

A first complaint lodged in late 1965 followed by another made to the Acting Secretary by Kosasih<sup>60</sup> regarding reports in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Daily Telegraph* which Kosasih believed were critical of Sukarno. The articles in the papers suggested that Sukarno had foreknowledge of the attempted coup and murders of the six Generals. In a memorandum to the Acting Secretary, Richard Woolcott reported visiting the editors of the papers and “suggested to them that they might be guarded in discrediting Sukarno through associating him with the Untung movement or writing him off as a political force. I said that I did not think there was sufficient evidence at this stage (i.e. Tuesday 5th) to justify unequivocal statements to this effect or to suggest he had been saved from a pro-communist coup and had re-established his authority”.<sup>61</sup> Woolcott noted that the editors made the changes to their reporting suggested by him and praised *The Sydney Morning Herald’s* editorial for its generosity on Sukarno. Woolcott commented, “It is of some interest and it could be of value to us in future situations when we might wish to take initiatives, that we are now in position to influence directly the content of leaders in practically all major metropolitan newspapers”.<sup>62</sup> This implies that visits to newspaper editors were not a common practice of the Department prior to this and serves to further highlight the importance Canberra placed on its relations with Indonesia.

A second instance of the Department’s attempts to influence the press occurred in April 1968 when *The Bulletin* magazine published an article entitled “What Malik Said” which reported comments made by Indonesian Foreign Affairs Minister, Adam Malik, to a press conference in Australia. Malik was asked by Les Love of the ABC whether he envisaged a future bilateral security treaty with Australia. Malik, answered through Marentek, a Third Secretary at the Indonesian Embassy. He translated Malik as saying, “Yes, at this stage we are thinking of it”.<sup>63</sup> This reply prompted what Peter Samuel of *The Bulletin* described as “an astonishing exercise by the Department of External Affairs”.<sup>64</sup> Journalists who were present at the press conference were phoned “and attempts made to persuade them that Mr Malik had not said what all their notebooks and memories recorded”.<sup>65</sup> Yet those who checked the accuracy of Marentek’s translation with the Indonesian Embassy were told it was correct. The following day, at an ECAFE (Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East) conference, Malik told reporters he had made a mistake. He said he had been talking about aid and was quoted as saying that, “We are only talking about a trade and aid

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<sup>59</sup> Record of Conversation with Major-General R.A. Kosasih, 7 October 1965. Report prepared by The Acting Secretary, Sir Lawrence McIntyre. The Plimsoll Papers, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Memorandum number 661 from R.A. Woolcott, Public Information Officer, Department of External Affairs to Acting Secretary Sir Lawrence McIntyre. No date. NAA: A1838/280, 3034/2/1/8 Part 1. “Indonesia-Political-Coup d’Etat of October 1965”.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Peter Samuel, “What Malik Said”, *The Bulletin*, 27 April 1968, p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

agreement and about an agricultural agreement at present".<sup>66</sup> A note sent by P.N. Hutton to the Secretary, Sir James Plimsoll, reveals the depth of the Department's annoyance at Samuel and other journalists. Hutton criticises methods by which he obtained information (e.g. phoning relatively junior officers of the Department and asking them to comment on the working habits of the Minister).<sup>67</sup> He did not accuse Samuel of lying or inaccuracy in reporting but does accuse him of writing what he considered "damaging to the Department"<sup>68</sup> and of "showing disregard for Departmental susceptibilities".<sup>69</sup>

In 1969 the Australian journal, *Quadrant*, published a special issue on Indonesia. It featured articles by leading Indonesian intellectuals such as Arief Budiman, Pramudya Ananta Toer (who had recently been released from custody in Irian Jaya, where he had been held for months on suspicion of belonging to LECTRA, the Communist-affiliated organisation for writers and artists), and Soedjatmoko. The articles covered a wide range of issues in Indonesian history and social and political life. The Australian Embassy in Jakarta realised it would cause difficulties with the Suharto Government if it were distributed from the Embassy as it had been on previous occasions. This difficulty is revealed in a Cablegram from Gordon Jockel, the Australian Ambassador, to External Affairs Canberra in which Jockel criticised the publication of the issue and argued against its distribution by the Embassy because, "This could be taken as a very poor compliment to the Soeharto Government and would reduce value of the publication in the official world here as demonstrating to the Indonesians the serious academic interest in Australia in Indonesia".<sup>70</sup> Jockel recommended "that the balance could be found by paying adequate recognition to the role and personality of President Soeharto and to the nature of his Government in the foreword which is no doubt being written for the publication".<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

The persistent efforts to influence or even control reporting by RA raises two important questions. To what degree does the Government have the right to compel its own broadcaster to propagate official views to a massive listening audience in a country of paramount interest to Australia (including that country's governing elites)?<sup>72</sup> Should the national interest over-ride editorial independence? In the period from 1965-1969 the Department of External Affairs went to considerable lengths on a number of occasions to influence reporting of Indonesia and Indonesian issues. These efforts were concentrated on RA which was subject to varying levels of pressure, threat and coercion to offer news items and commentary on Indonesia which was in accordance with the Government's wishes. To what degree this improved the Indonesian-Australian relations is impossible to determine, but what is possible to assess is the

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Note from P.N. Hutton, Public Information Officer, Department of External Affairs to Sir James Plimsoll. 24 April 1968. NAA: A1838/280, 3034/10/15 Part 1. "Indonesia-Political-Relations with Australia-Visit of Foreign Minister Malik to Australia".

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Samuel, "What Malik Said".

<sup>70</sup> Cablegram number 2479 from Jockel to External Affairs, Canberra. Dated and received 22 September 1969. NAA: A1838/280, 3034/10/1 Part 32. "Indonesia-Political-Relations with Australia".

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Hodge, *Radio Wars*, p. 252.

importance Canberra placed on “sympathetic” reporting of Indonesia by both the public and private media. The former, because of its exposure to misconceptions among some in the Indonesian elites that RA reporting necessarily reflected the views of the Federal Government, the latter due to a lack of appreciation in Indonesia of the freedom of the press in Australia, and the degree to which reporting in the private media reflected widely-held views in the Australian community.