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Veilleux-Lepage, Y.; Federowicz, J.; Fremont-Barnes, G.

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## CHAPTER 7

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# The Mau Mau Revolt in Kenya, 1952–56

Yannick Veilleux-Lepage and Jan Fedorowicz

### INTRODUCTION

The Mau Mau rebellion confronted the British colonial authorities in Kenya with a complex array of challenges. Earlier policies to develop the country by promoting European settlement dispossessed native Kenyans (particularly the Kikuyu) from their traditional lands, leading them to move to the cities in search of work. Cities such as Nairobi grew at unsustainable rates, becoming centers of crime and recruiting grounds for increasingly organized and radical protests. The work of European Christian missionaries undermined traditional values and practices leading to further dislocation and conflict.

In all of this turmoil, a variety of local political programs emerged. Some sought to improve their lot by working within the framework of the colonial administration. Others began to formulate a solution that transcended any particular tribal, linguistic, or ethnic group and offered a vision for Kenya as a whole. Still others, like the Kikuyu people whose lands bore the brunt of European settlement, pursued a traditional tribal focus.

The original Kikuyu Central Association, founded in the 1920s, was disbanded for security reasons with the outbreak of World War II and was eventually replaced after the war by the more politically aggressive Kenyan African Union. At the same time, some 100,000 Kenyan veterans returned home from war service, no longer impressed by the mystique of the white man, more politically aware than their predecessors and facing the challenge of reintegrating back into society.

The intersection of these complex trends gave rise to what came to be known as the Mau Mau rebellion. Centered on the Kikuyu people and often directed as much against other Kenyan groups as against the British colonialists, resistance took ever more radical and violent forms in both the cities and the countryside. This expanding conflict left the colonial British administration with several specific challenges:

- The first was how to respond to the land pressures that had disrupted traditional livelihoods and forced the Kikuyu into the cities.
- The second was to differentiate between and respond effectively to two distinct types of resistance, one in the cities and one in the countryside.
- The third was to select and implement measures to identify and isolate the real threat, taking care not to push neutral parties into the arms of Mau Mau.
- The fourth was to find ways of extending thin security resources in a way that was effective in reducing the Mau Mau insurgency.
- The fifth was to make better use of intelligence as an asset in the campaign.

This chapter summarizes the way in which the colonial administration dealt with these challenges through a combination of applying prior experience and ongoing improvisation. Its responses were not always immediately successful, but the ultimate outcome was to defeat the Mau Mau rebellion and set the stage for a peaceful transition to the postcolonial era.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE MAU MAU REBELLION**

The roots of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya lie in the agrarian crisis that challenged the Kikuyu people, one of 42 tribes or ethnic groupings inhabiting the country. Prior to the establishment of British colonial rule, the Kikuyu of central Kenya were involved in a significant southward expansion leading to the establishment of tribal customs and kinship obligations that regulated the occupation, ownership, and utilization of land.<sup>1</sup> Kikuyu political radicalization was a reaction to the severe pressure exerted on tribal lands with the coming of European colonists, who advanced claims over large swathes of Kikuyu land located in Kenya's central highlands. These settlers employed Kikuyu labor to tend the land, reducing the Kikuyu to the status of tenant farmers.

The history of European settlement in Kenya is inextricably linked with the development of the Uganda Railway. On July 1, 1895, Her Majesty's political agent and consul general in Zanzibar, A. H. Hardinge, accepted the transfer of coastal areas as well as the interior, which included Kikuyu lands. This came to be known as the Central Province of the Imperial British Africa Company.<sup>2</sup> In the same year, the British government began construction of the Kenya and Uganda Railway, which was to run from Lake Victoria, the headwaters of the Nile, to the port of Mombasa on the

Indian Ocean. Costing £6,500,000, this 582 mile-long railroad was to provide transport for military forces to the Nile and neighboring Uganda. Germany had colonies and military forces nearby in German East Africa, and it was feared that Germany might seek to interfere with the Nile, thereby threatening Egypt and the British hold over the Suez Canal—the main route to the colonies in India and the Far East.<sup>3</sup> Though this extreme scenario never materialized, the development of the railway did provide for the faster and more efficient colonization of Kenya.<sup>4</sup>

As construction proceeded, Kenya experienced a significant influx of Indian laborers, who constituted the bulk of the skilled workforce required to build the railway. Concurrently, to develop the colony so it would become financially self-sufficient and to create a settler economy to finance the railway, Charles Eliot, the governor of British East Africa, launched a campaign to attract British settlers to Kenya to take advantage of the rich agricultural potential of its pastoral lands. In doing so, he reserved the highlands for white settlers.<sup>5</sup> The most important step taken by the colonial government to enable European settlement in Kenya was the alienation of Kikuyu land. Before constructing the railway, the colonial government declared in 1892 that “the Land Acquisition Act allowed the administration to acquire land compulsorily for the railway.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the Land Ordinance of 1902 enabled settlers to acquire land on a 99-year lease. In sum, these ordinances, and those that followed, gave the state the responsibility of doling out land to settlers as it saw fit. These powers regarding land distribution were further augmented by the 1915 Land Ordinance, which increased the length of land leases to Europeans from 99 to 999 years, established native reserves, and empowered the governor to reduce the reserve lands as he deemed fit.<sup>7</sup> As European settlement continued, land that the Kikuyu had traditionally farmed or grazed was alienated for the use of British settlers. According to Carl Roseburg and John Nottingham, about 60,000 acres were alienated in the Kiambu-Limuru areas between 1903 and 1906, and by 1933, 109.5 square miles of prime, highly fertile Kikuyu land had been taken for European settlement.<sup>8</sup>

The strategy of ongoing reduction of reserve lands, as permitted by the 1915 Land Ordinance, was advocated by the settlers as an effective tool for inducing native laborers to seek their livelihood on European farms. The colonial officials also introduced taxation policies, such as the Hut Tax and the Poll Tax, to further create a pool of low-wage labor and to address the shortage of voluntary labor. During the colony’s early days, the scarcity of manual labor for the settlers’ farms represented one of the largest challenges to the establishment of a viable settler economy in Kenya. The primary source of labor was native labor in the form of squatters, who were allowed to live on or near the farms and who reaped some benefit from the land in exchange for their manual labor.<sup>9</sup> A squatter and

his family would be allowed to live on a white settler's farm, usually in a separated area, and was permitted to raise some crops and graze a limited number of livestock in exchange for work performed for the settler. The squatter system closely mirrored the sharecropper model, which the United States had implemented in the southern states following the Civil War.

In the 1940s, Kenya experienced great prosperity as a result of the rise in agricultural prices relating to the war in Europe. Concurrently, many male settlers left their settlements to serve in the armed forces overseas, thus leaving the squatters and peasants to their own devices in respect of crop production. During this period, the squatters were able to increase the return on their crops by selling to the British government. However, this situation changed drastically after the war, when squatter cultivation was limited to 2.5 acres per wife, and the number of livestock the natives were allowed to keep was also greatly reduced. Moreover, male squatters were forced to work at least 270 days per year, thereby restricting their ability to cultivate their own land.<sup>10</sup>

The postwar period saw an enormous influx of Kikuyu into the metropolitan centers such as Nairobi and Mombasa. In fact, between 1941 and 1948, the population of Nairobi grew at a rate of 17 percent per year. Faced with this influx and a subsequent increase in crime, new legislation sought to exercise tighter control over population flows and to increase the police presence. However, these initiatives had little impact, and by 1950, Kikuyu street gangs exercised a considerable amount of power on the streets of Nairobi. These street gangs would later help fuel the Mau Mau movement by providing a large pool of disenfranchised and displaced young men from which to draw recruits.<sup>11</sup>

Adding to native grievances were religious pressures from the Christian missionaries. The missionaries brought their own version of education and religion, and many Kikuyu converted to Christianity. The missionaries, however, were largely intolerant of Kikuyu traditions and saw these as conflicting with Christianity. Sons who became Christians were forbidden by the church from participating in "heathen" ceremonies important to their fathers.<sup>12</sup> Further, the missionaries condemned polygamy and other tribal traditions such as clitorrectomy. Although the natives could find no prohibitions on these traditions in the Bible, this dichotomy provoked an identity crisis among many natives who felt neither fully Kikuyu nor fully Christian.<sup>13</sup>

## THE ORIGINS OF THE MAU MAU INSURGENCY

Prior to World War I, there was virtually no organized political opposition to British colonization in Kenya. Kenyan political consciousness first manifested itself in Nairobi within two opposing groups. The

first, mostly composed of Kikuyu, opposed the colonial system but had no aims beyond pressing the colonial government about unfair wages. The second sought to work within the colonial system to advance the rights of native Kenyans. The British authorities naturally favored the second group, and the Kikuyu group collapsed and was eventually replaced by the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) in 1924. The KCA gained popularity among the Kikuyu people by combining its anticolonial message with ancient Kikuyu cultural practices, such as oathing (discussed later in this section). As many aspects of traditional Kikuyu life were based on verbal and religious oaths taken by individuals as a form of verbal covenant, the organization used the system of oathing to secure its members' loyalty.<sup>14</sup>

In 1940, the KCA was banned by the colonial government as a part of a strategy of wartime controls on African political activities. At that time, the organization claimed a membership of more than 7,000 individuals, with a considerably larger support base.<sup>15</sup> Once World War II ended, the justification for preventing black associations lapsed, and the British allowed a new organization to form. This one aspired to be a real political party, known as the Kenya African Union (KAU). The conclusion of World War II also saw nearly 100,000 Kenyan natives who had fought on behalf of the British released from service to begin new lives in Kenya. Brian Lapping points out that these Kenyan veterans had served side by side with British soldiers and "had seen for the first time [the British] as no more than equals."<sup>16</sup> This in turn "made them a dangerous, volatile group."<sup>17</sup> Unemployed and underemployed Kikuyu veterans in low-income areas now had the time and the inclination to listen to inflammatory anticolonial speeches from educated KAU leaders. Though it is uncertain whether the listeners fully appreciated the lofty concepts and ideals of equality, independence, labor rights, and African nationalism espoused by KAU leaders, they certainly grasped the sentiment. The message of stolen lands and European exploitation gave the Kikuyu a cause around which they could rally and express their discontent.<sup>18</sup>

Between 1944 and 1946, the KAU quickly built a membership of over 100,000 under the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta. The majority within the KAU represented a moderate reform movement and a schism soon developed as the radical remnants of the KCA began pressing for more subversive action. In fact, the KAU was completely infiltrated by ex-members of the banned KCA, including the *Anake a forti*, the "Forty Group," composed of ex-Kenyan service members who returned to Nairobi after World War II to find themselves unemployed and in unacceptable living conditions.<sup>19</sup> For these individuals, and many others, the formal politics espoused by the KAU held little appeal. Instead, they found black market dealings and violence the only solution to their deteriorating situation. The underground leadership of the KCA subsequently altered its

recruitment strategy to become a viable mass movement. It is during these organizational transformations that the group known as Mau Mau first emerged. In fact, as early as 1948, the British colonial administration was awash in reports from both settlers and natives regarding the emergence of a new anticolonial movement. The director of Intelligence and Security of the colonial government confirmed the reports and even went as far as submitting his own, claiming that Mau Mau was related to the KCA.

The report identified Mau Mau as a militant movement thought to have been responsible for frequent agitation against colonial rule in the late 1940s. Its members were understood to take oaths of allegiance to each other.<sup>20</sup> The administration of oaths was aimed at overcoming the lack of coherence in the Mau Mau movement as well as the lack of a sense of nationalism or commitment to an ideology or religion, which traditionally gives unity to other insurgency and resistance movements. By incorporating Kikuyu tribal traditions, as the KCA had previously done, Mau Mau leaders attempted to create a sense of unity. In fact, although the political content of the Mau Mau's oath was relatively new, oaths had long been part of everyday life in the Mount Kenya region.<sup>21</sup> During the nineteenth century, oaths were used primarily to cement social and legal contracts between parties or to solidify future commitments, for example, in relation to land or marriage. However, in the years leading to the state of emergency, Kikuyu oathing was used to mobilize radical support and to warn against attempts to pass on information regarding their activities to the authorities. The tactical and pragmatic importance of oathing appears to have been lost on the colonial government, which could not see beyond the ritualistic superstition of the practice. The prevailing mysticism surrounding oathing, along with the fact that Mau Mau intentions remained fluid, added to the movement's image as being dark and irrational. It prompted the colonial administration to announce a ban on membership in Mau Mau in August 1950.<sup>22</sup>

As the British government identified oathing by militants as the root cause of the violence, the Kenya police and the provincial administration's tribal police attempted to disrupt oathing ceremonies and to arrest ringleaders. Despite this, the violence and disruptions perpetrated by Mau Mau continued, fuelled in part by the intransigence of both London and the almost exclusively European settler representation on Kenya's Legislative Council. As attacks on the homes of European settlers and Kikuyu loyalists grew, together with the symbolic mutilation of their cattle, British and local authorities began to hear reports that made reference to the activities of a secret Kikuyu organization called Mau Mau. Moreover, in February 1951, the extremist elements of the KAU seized control of the organization by removing the more moderate elements led by Jomo Kenyatta through the mechanism of a rigged election. Under its new

leadership, the KAU turned its attention to obtaining arms and supporters for what it saw as the eventual clash with the settlers. This clash would manifest itself in what would become the Kenyan emergency in 1952.<sup>23</sup>

From 1952 to early 1953, Mau Mau had not yet centralized its organizational framework and, as a consequence, its military and political efforts were effectively uncoordinated. Accordingly, "the result was seven months of random, intimidating violence and general confusion."<sup>24</sup> In fact, the disorganization was so acute that one Mau Mau leader, Waruhiu Iote, known as General China, was unaware of another large group of Mau Mau operating in another part of the country.<sup>25</sup> It has been argued that this failure on the part of Mau Mau to articulate a coherent end-state with attainable goals to their constituents contributed to their inability to mobilize the population, who came to hate and fear Mau Mau more than they did the British colonialists.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the Mau Mau made a conscious effort to maintain the loyalty of adherents and supporters. Support for the active wing, the actual Mau Mau insurgents, was provided by the so-called passive wing made up of Kikuyu in villages, in native reserves, and in the countryside. They were nominally organized into groups of fewer than 10 people and were responsible for providing food, weapons, ammunition, and cash to operational Mau Mau members, who tended to work in small teams of 5–15 members.<sup>27</sup>

Though the number of attacks on the homes of European settlers and Kikuyu loyalists kept increasing, the governor of Kenya, Sir Philip Mitchell, who was only months away from retirement by early 1952, remained unwilling to curtail the rise in rural violence and demonstrated a particular obstinacy in refusing to tackle this growing problem.<sup>28</sup> In fact, even the colonial secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, corresponding with Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced that Sir Philip "did not take a very alarmist view of the situation on Kenya."<sup>29</sup> Four months after Mitchell's departure, London posted a new governor to Kenya, Sir Evelyn Baring, who quickly identified the danger of the situation. In fact, arson attacks against European settler properties were common, with over 60 incidents recorded between January and March 1952 around the town of Nyeri alone.<sup>30</sup> Settler farmers were not the only victims. Between August 1 and October 20, 1952, some 34 Africans were murdered, and this number included Chief Waruhiu, one of the strongest supporters of the British presence in Kenya.<sup>31</sup> On October 20, citing the existence of a "planned revolutionary movement" and in an effort to curb the mounting levels of rural violence and urban disquiet, Governor Baring declared a state of emergency.<sup>32</sup> This marked the beginning of a counterinsurgency campaign that received relatively little public attention in Britain. Few would have foreseen at the time that the campaign would soon include an attempt by the military to transfer lessons about combating asymmetrical warfare from one theatre of operations to another.

## POLITICAL RESPONSE TO MAU MAU

As Governor Baring declared a state of emergency, the initial response to Mau Mau took the form of Operation *Jock Scott*, which was conducted by the police and the army and set the tone for future cooperation between them. Leading political figures associated with the militants, most controversially Jomo Kenyatta and other senior KAU office holders, were arrested in an effort to stifle Mau Mau momentum. The crackdown on suspected Mau Mau members was also extended to trade unions and nationalist movements in an attempt to cripple any solidarity from groups perceived to harbor anticolonial sentiment. Within three weeks of Governor Baring declaring a state of emergency, nearly 8,000 arrests had been made.

The day after the launch of Operation *Jock Scott*, Chief Nderi and two police escorts were murdered in Nyeri after they attempted to disrupt an oath-taking ceremony. A series of gruesome settler murders were committed in the months that followed. Settlers, in turn, responded by expelling large numbers of formerly loyal Kikuyu laborers from their farms. The systematic eviction of Kikuyu from areas where alleged Mau Mau crimes had occurred only became official policy on December 15, 1952, but the authorities did assist with evictions prior to this date. For example, following the murder of Commander Meiklejohn in Thomson's Falls, the Lancashire Fusiliers removed 750 Kikuyu men and 3,300 children during a sweep through the surrounding area.<sup>33</sup> By November 1952, the legal powers extended to magistrates to try Mau Mau offenses were strengthened by the creation of new regulations facilitating the seizure of property.<sup>34</sup> In December 1952, Governor Baring announced a new Emergency Tax levied against all Kikuyu, which proved extremely unpopular. Another action controversial among the Kikuyu population was the trial of the popular and respected political leader, Jomo Kenyatta, which began on December 3, 1952, and led to his conviction for leading Mau Mau.

The move to outlaw the anticolonial activities of large segments of both the Kikuyu and the wider nationalist population, along with the evictions of Kikuyu laborers, served to alienate ordinary Kikuyu and drove many toward supporting Mau Mau.<sup>35</sup> As a result of Operation *Jock Scott*, the 12,500 Mau Mau thought to be active combatants in 1952 soon grew to more than 100,000 within a year.<sup>36</sup> The fact that the colonial authorities estimated that up to 90 percent of the Kikuyu population of 1.5 million had taken Mau Mau oaths helps to make sense of the draconian, catch-all detention policy put forward by the colonial government. However, this population estimate was exaggerated and resulted in an unobvious approach to distinguishing insurgents from the Kikuyu community from other Kenyans. In other words, the policy was flawed from the outset.

The emergency policy began to take on a more coherent shape after the arrival of General Sir George Erskine in June 1953. He was an able and politically aware professional soldier who as commander in chief of the military also exercised operational control over the police and auxiliary forces. In July 1953, the colonial government initiated a program of rehabilitation for former or captured Mau Mau. This process, informally dubbed the “pipeline,” was intended as a “complete blueprint for winning the war against Mau Mau using socio-economic and civil reform.”<sup>37</sup> Composed of some 100 detention camps, which eventually saw some 80,000 Kikuyu men and women passing through their gates, the process was designed to convert the Mau Mau insurgents into progressive and productive members of Kenyan society via a combination of reeducation and Christian theology.

The process of reeducating Mau Mau insurgents relied heavily on convincing the individuals in question that the colonial government had the Kikuyu’s best interests in mind and that Mau Mau were in fact detrimental to Kikuyu society. The reform movement sought to convince the Kikuyu people that a much brighter future lay in supporting the government rather than supporting Mau Mau. The reeducation programs implemented in the detention camps focused on undermining revolutionary ideology. Similarly, Christian Kikuyu evangelists were permanently attached to detention camps for Mau Mau detainees. A detainee who wanted to reform was required to confess to actions perpetrated against the colonial government and the Kikuyu people: this confession would also be recorded. Additionally, the detainee would have to confess he had taken a Mau Mau oath and renounced previous beliefs. This process was often interspersed with unofficial “cleansing ceremonies,” whereby authorities attempted to purge the influence of mystic seers and Mau Mau oaths from the detainees in rituals carried out by Kikuyu elders nicknamed, “Her Majesty’s Witchdoctors.”<sup>38</sup>

As was the case with the Emergency Regulations for Detained Persons of 1952, the rehabilitation policy was directly influenced by the much larger counterinsurgency campaign being fought simultaneously on the Malayan peninsula. In the months preceding the official rehabilitation policy announcement, Governor Baring turned to General Templer—the British high commissioner in Malaya appointed to deal with the Malayan emergency—for assistance and requested that he dispatch an officer from Malaya to advise him on the rehabilitation of Mau Mau detainees. Instead, however, because of the shortage of manpower in Malaya, Thomas Garrett Askwith, the commissioner for Community Development in Kenya, was sent to Malaya to tour the detention camps and rehabilitation centers. He was also briefed by Templer on the Malayan approach. Askwith’s subsequent recommendations were to provide the substance of Kenya’s official rehabilitation policy, most notably in its

emphasis on reeducation and the clear distinction made between the treatment of sympathizers and the treatment of insurgent fighters.

As part of this distinction, the pipeline operated a white-grey-black classification system: "whites" were cooperative detainees who were repatriated back to the reserves; "greys" had been oathed but were reasonably compliant and were moved down the pipeline to work camps in their own districts before being released; and "blacks" were the so-called hard core of Mau Mau. These individuals were moved up the pipeline to special detention camps. Thus, a detainee's position in the pipeline was a straightforward reflection of how cooperative supervisory personnel deemed them to be. Deeper historical research, however, has shown that such distinctions were arbitrary and that "cooperation" was defined in terms of a detainee's readiness to confess to his or her Mau Mau oath.

The incarceration and rehabilitation of tens of thousands of detainees dealt with only the most immediate and violent threat to the colonial order. What remained was the even more complex and, in the long run, more important issue of restoring the shattered political and economic structures of legitimate authority and effective control over the Kenyan peasantry. Completed in different places at different times throughout 1954, a radical program of social reform was initiated by the provincial administration in Central Province. Its focus was the construction of fortified villages, based on models developed in Malaya as part of the counterinsurgency program, in a process known as "villagization." As in Malaya, this program was designed to disrupt the activities of the insurgent supply network by breaking the links between guerrillas hiding in the forests and their supporters in the reserves. It also served to punish the disloyal population. Between June 1954 and October 1955, over 1 million Kikuyu were forcibly resettled into 854 villages.<sup>39</sup>

The villagization process proved to be a strategic success in terms of bringing the Kikuyu population under the control of the provincial administration and served to isolate the forest fighters from their bases of support and their ability to procure supplies. However, as the fighting began to subside, administrators increasingly came to see these villages as valuable resources for the reconstruction of Kikuyu society. Emphasis then shifted from punishment to the more positive function of using these villages for reconstructing Kikuyu society on a stable, three-class, basis consisting of the wealthy elite, a solid and numerically dominant peasant middle class, and a lower class of landless artisans and laborers.

The first installment of this process was based on the Swynnerton Plan of 1953 and called for the removal of structural obstacles to African agricultural production within the political economy of colonial Kenya. The basic tenet of this plan was that communal land ownership would be replaced with a land tenure system. This new system would encourage individuals to invest their own time and labor in improving the land that

would enable them to profit from their own work. The program was intended to combat Mau Mau insofar as land belonging to Mau Mau fighters or supporters would be seized and consolidated. This system was widely held to be a highly effective tool because seizure and loss of land was considered to be one of the most severe punishments that could be inflicted on a Kikuyu. The Swynnerton Plan assumed a “counter-revolutionary” function to further punish Mau Mau supporters and reward loyalists, thereby hastening the end of the emergency.

The implementation of the Swynnerton Plan was thus not only aimed at overhauling land use and tenure rights throughout Kenya, it also served to alleviate one of the primary grievances of the Kikuyu and thus undermined the appeal of Mau Mau. However, as noted by Andrew Mumford, the benefits of the land consolidation were overshadowed by other factors. First, the detention and rehabilitation process was characterized by widespread indifference to the detainee’s welfare. This undoubtedly acted as a catalyst for relatives and friends of those interned. Second, the absence of impartial jurisprudence tainted political and legal efforts to counter Mau Mau. Between 1952 and 1958, over 3,000 Mau Mau suspects stood trial on charges related to the insurgency, and of these, some 1,090 would be hanged.

### **BRITISH MILITARY RESPONSE**

The British Army’s strategy against the Mau Mau insurgency was influenced by its experience of dealing with similar revolts in various parts of the empire during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. John Pimlott has observed that the relative success of the British Army against insurgency can in part be attributed to the experience gained from its “imperial past.”<sup>40</sup> Many British soldiers who fought against the Mau Mau in Kenya were seasoned veterans of several colonial conflicts. During the early 1950s, the British Army was involved in operational theatres in Malaya, Korea, and Kenya, and it had only recently left Palestine. Moreover, officers and enlisted men with more than seven years of active service had also served in World War II. This strategic advantage would prove to be devastating to the Mau Mau, which was comparatively speaking largely unprepared to face such combat-experienced veterans.

Despite this strategic advantage, after the declaration of the state of emergency, it soon became apparent that the colonial government had no overall strategy for dealing with the revolt. Moreover, the initial military bulwark against the Mau Mau insurgency consisted of just three battalions of the King’s African Rifles, a level of manpower equivalent to a third of the estimated Mau Mau forces. Faced with insufficient forces and lacking a clear strategy, military operations in the first months were quite seriously flawed. By late 1952, Mau Mau began forming clusters in

forest areas where they were able to pool resources. The Kenyan forests provided a base area for Mau Mau survival. The rugged countryside provided them with relative security from British operations.<sup>41</sup>

Faced with inadequate military resources at his disposal, Governor Baring requested the appointment of a director of operations whose role was envisaged to be similar to that performed by Briggs and then Templer in Malaya. The request was submitted in November and again in December 1952, but the War Office instead appointed Colonel G. Rimbault as personal staff officer, a position with limited authority.<sup>42</sup> This appointment reflected the failure on the part of the War Office to appreciate the seriousness of the Kenyan situation. This failure was evident again when the reluctance to send in more British battalions led to the further overstretching of the colonial troops. On January 6, 1953, British sweeping operations pushed into the forests for the first time. After declaring the northern Aberdare Mountains area prohibited to all civilians, the army and police launched Operation *Blitz*. In these "prohibited areas," troops could open fire without warning. The operation was, however, confined to the forest fringe and the Mau Mau avoided security forces by moving deeper into the dense forest. Still suffering from manpower shortages, the security forces were limited in their ability to launch offensives because of the constant demands for protection of the settlers.

One solution to the manpower problem appeared to be the creation of Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru Home Guard units, some of which existed in an unofficial capacity before the emergency was declared. By March 1953, there were 18,000 Home Guards in Central Province,<sup>43</sup> a force that was central to the British counterinsurgency strategy. The nature of the Home Guards changed as the campaign continued. They were originally formed to patrol localities, guard schools, escort chiefs and headmen, act as guides for the military, and participate in screenings. They normally operated exclusively within the reserves, leaving the forests to the police and the army. As the struggle against the Mau Mau escalated, the intelligence gained from Home Guard personnel proved invaluable, and they helped ensure that Mau Mau influence would not take hold in untouched areas or even in areas where potential recruits might exist. Mirroring somewhat the Strategic Hamlet program implemented by the U.S. Army in Vietnam, the Home Guards limited the Mau Mau's ability to intimidate and recruit from the local population. The Home Guards outnumbered Mau Mau insurgents and acted as security forces in Kikuyu villages. As with the Strategic Hamlet program, this greatly increased the power of the Home Guards and curtailed Mau Mau influence in these areas.

In February 1953, important changes were made to the command and control structure in Kenya. The chief of Imperial General Staff (CIGS), General Sir John Harding, partially relented in his response to Governor Baring's demands and appointed Major General William Hinde as chief

staff officer to the governor. Upon his arrival, General Hinde spent a month touring the affected areas to draw up recommendations for combating the insurgency. General Hinde elected to maintain an emphasis on policing to uphold law and order, with the military only fulfilling an auxiliary role. He continued this approach even as Mau Mau violence escalated—a problem compounded by poor intelligence and an as-yet unclear counterinsurgency strategy. He optimistically believed that the Mau Mau could be beaten with existing resources; however, faced with claims of Hinde's lackluster approach to the campaign, the CIGS itself intervened to increase British military strength in Kenya by two brigades and two additional battalions, raising the British military presence to some 10,000 troops.

Two events on the night of March 26, 1953, dramatically escalated the conflict. The Mau Mau attacked Lari village and the Naivasha police station almost simultaneously. At Lari, the Mau Mau massacred 120 civilians, while in the raid at Naivasha they released prisoners and stole arms and ammunition, thereby embarrassing the colonial government. Lari represented the beginning of an assault on the Home Guards aimed at discouraging loyalism. These events forced the authorities to realize that the Mau Mau was a serious and organized movement that would not quickly fade away. Following the Lari and Naivasha attacks, there was rising criticism of Hinde's handling of the campaign, particularly from the European settler community who felt exposed to the increase in violence by his perceived intransigence. This reached a crescendo in the spring of 1953, when he was replaced in May by Lieutenant General Sir George Erskine.

Erskine's appointment signifies the moment when the British started to take the Mau Mau insurgency seriously. The growing urgency was also reflected in the decision to upgrade Erskine's role to general officer commanding of the East Africa Command. Erskine built on Hinde's prohibited area policy and instituted a one-mile forbidden strip along the edges of heavily forested areas. This one-mile strip was intended to interrupt the flow of food supplies into the forest and to allow security forces to monitor movements between the reserves and the forest. In addition to building on the policies instigated by Hinde, Erskine identified two main operational deficiencies within the British forces in Kenya. The first was "the absence of an offensive spirit," and the second was ambiguity in "the decision as to which areas should be given military treatment."<sup>44</sup> Erskine would attempt to remedy this situation by dividing the army into three "striking forces" organized to tackle particular Mau Mau strongholds.

To increase the offensive nature of engagements, Erskine deployed the 39th Brigade and RAF aircraft in Aberdare. The army sustained almost continuous attacks throughout June and July, although these offensives

appeared to improve loyalist morale and civil-military cooperation. As a response to these intense actions, Erskine called for extra troops to escalate the offensive and for the implementation of a new tactic to strike at the insurgents hidden within the deep forest. By August 10, five tracks were constructed into the forest, each with a military encampment at the end, allowing for deep penetration into enemy territory. Subsequently, Erskine ordered a further 20 tracks be constructed. Using these tracks, the army launched large-scale forest operations from July to August, followed by lower-profile interventions, such as small patrols, pursuing food denial measures and attempting to deny the Mau Mau control of the reserves. At the same time, the police and administration strengthened their positions.

Erskine's appointment also reversed the previous military tendency to ignore the successful lessons of the Malayan campaign. Citing the Malayan model as his inspiration for a restructuring of the command structure in Kenya, Erskine appointed Hinde as his deputy director of Operations and General Cameron as deputy commander in chief for the rest of the East African theatre. He also established Malaya-style civil-military committees.<sup>45</sup> At the national level, a War Cabinet was created consisting of the four most senior civil-military leaders: the governor, the deputy governor, the commander in chief, and the minister without portfolio. Beneath the War Cabinet sat an Emergency Joint Staff that dealt with more operational matters and was composed of the leadership from the colony's police, army, and civil service. Decentralization was followed and, as in Malaya, Provincial and District Emergency Committees were formed consisting of local police, army, and political leaders. These organization reforms were vital for the next stage in the offensive, which demanded far more effective cooperation.

Perhaps the most overt display of the military lessons percolating the Kenyan campaign was the publication of the 1954 *Handbook of Anti-Mau Mau Operations*, which was distributed to officers in Kenya. This manual borrowed the wording and the operational premises of its Malayan precursor, the *Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya (ATOM) Manual*, and demonstrated the colonial government's clear intention to transfer tactical and operational lessons from Malaya into Kenya. In fact, as Andrew Mumford points out, "Erskine sent a telegram to the Commander-in-Chief of the Far East Land Force acknowledging that the ATOM Manual 'has been much used as a basis for [training] in anti-Mau Mau operations. All available copies have been passed to the units concerned. . . .'"<sup>46</sup>

Despite attempts to transpose the lessons learned from the Malayan emergency, these remain entirely different campaigns. For example, military operations in Kenya were carried out on a scale not seen in Malaya. More specifically, these operations were undertaken in both urban and rural environments, a scenario very different from that in Malaya.

The Mau Mau insurgency was characterized by the presence of a radicalized and organized urban segment of the insurgency, which contrasted with the disparate groups hiding in the forests. Mau Mau's strength in Nairobi demanded a proportionately powerful response by the colonial authorities. Earlier urban counterinsurgency tactics had been ineffective and far too localized to have any real and lasting impact on the larger conduct of the campaign. In an attempt to neutralize Mau Mau's ability to conduct operations in an urban setting, the colonial military together with political authorities launched Operation *Anvil*. On April 24, 1954, the security forces sealed every road, track, and path in and out of Nairobi. No Africans were allowed to pass the checkpoints, and the city was closed for the next month as five British battalions, one KAR battalion, 300 police, hundreds of Home Guards, and numerous Kenya Police Reserve officers systematically searched every area of the city. The operation was the largest urban cordon-and-search operation ever undertaken by the British military up to that point.<sup>47</sup> For a month, the Nairobi Kikuyu population of approximately 50,000 were systematically screened, 24,100 were detained, and a further 6,150 were repatriated to the Central Province.<sup>48</sup> In sum, more than half of the city's largest ethnic group was removed in a period of four weeks, which had profound effects on Nairobi's social fabric, its economic stability, and the course of the campaign itself.

On a social and ethnic level, the indiscriminate nature of the British round-up conveyed the lack of subtlety in the British approach to the various African ethnic groups.<sup>49</sup> The screening teams enjoyed absolute power and worked to a quota rather than making informed decisions about a person's subversive attributes.<sup>50</sup> Inevitably, and bearing in mind the size of the operation, flawed intelligence, the ambiguity of allegiances among the population and the inability of the colonial authorities to successfully differentiate between friend and foe, meant that many loyalists were caught in *Anvil's* net, thus endangering their widespread antipathy toward Mau Mau.<sup>51</sup> However, from a military perspective, Operation *Anvil* marked a major turning point in the campaign. Mau Mau supplies, as well as its command and control structure, and its recruitment capabilities in Nairobi were severely disrupted and never fully recovered.<sup>52</sup> However, this success came at the price of alienating large swathes of the originally anti-insurgent indigenous population. According to Mumford, "the un-nuanced nature of Operation *Anvil*, the first major post-war urban counter-insurgency operation undertaken by the British Army, puts future urban operations conducted in Yemen and particularly Northern Ireland into context and helps develop a lineage for the British approach to urban campaigning in a low-intensity conflict environment."<sup>53</sup>

Following Operation *Anvil*, gang activity in Nairobi dramatically declined, although large numbers of Mau Mau still roamed the forests with virtual impunity. In fact, support for Mau Mau actually surged in

Embu and Meru after large numbers of people were returned to the districts as a result of Operation *Anvil*.<sup>54</sup> With Nairobi maintained as a secure base, post-*Anvil* operations developed in three phases. Phase 1 started with the districts closest to the city—Kiambu, Fort Hall, and Thika. Phase 2, which took place from August to November 1954, focused on Nyeri and Embu. Phase 3 took place in Meru as well as the settled areas next to Mount Kenya and the Aberdare Mountains. The security situation improved in all of these areas by the end of 1954, with post-*Anvil* operations considered a military success.<sup>55</sup> To further increase the security of settler properties in the Rift Valley, the number of Farm Guards, a group similar to the Home Guards, was expanded, and British soldiers on leave sometimes spent a weekend or a couple of weeks at settler farms to discourage further attacks.<sup>56</sup> By the end of 1954, the combination of military operations and villagization had largely driven the Mau Mau out of the reserves, had inflicted heavy losses, and had prevented the Mau Mau from securing additional logistical support and reinforcements. The rebels found themselves mainly confined to the forests of the Aberdare Mountains and Mount Kenya.

As with the urban campaign, the forest campaign proved to be equally slow in reaching a level of operational effectiveness. Small-scale sweeps through the forest and foothills typified the rural military approach in the early years of the emergency. It was not until 1955, three years into the campaign, that two major forest operations took place signaling a shift in tactics. The first of these was Operation *Hammer*, which took place from mid-December 1954 until February 1955 in areas immediately adjoining the Aberdare Mountains. The second was Operation *First Flute*, from February to April 1955.

Operation *Hammer*, which complemented the urban-focused Operation *Anvil*, raised the level of the campaign in the forest area.<sup>57</sup> Capitalizing on improved road infrastructure in the Aberdare Mountains, British commanders led 10,000 troops through the forest region in a massive show of force with the aim of detaining up to 2,000 Mau Mau suspected of hiding there. The operation lasted more than a month, but it resulted in just 161 suspected insurgents killed, captured, or surrendered. General Erskine condemned the whole operation with faint praise: "I did not expect spectacular terrorist casualties, neither were they achieved."<sup>58</sup> While Operation *Hammer* was deemed a failure from an operational perspective, the military next attempted to reinvigorate the rural campaign with Operation *First Flute*. Using a similar number of troops as Operation *Hammer*, Operation *First Flute* was intended to engage a 3,000-strong insurgent group in the wider Mount Kenya area. Two months after the beginning of *First Flute*, 189 insurgents had been killed, 43 captured, and 45 had surrendered.<sup>59</sup> Andrew Mumford has argued that one of the most pertinent lessons of rural operations in Malaya, one that was not heeded

in Kenya, was that contact with insurgents takes time, patience, and endurance. In Kenya, operations that initially appear to be reaping little reward were called off. This was in contrast to the acceptance of operational longevity, as was done in Malaya. It can be explained by the colonial interpretation of “Mau Mau as an atavistic irritant and not a well-versed, well-disciplined, well-organised insurgent enemy.”<sup>60</sup> As such, the expenditure of significant military resources on the rural campaign was not in keeping with the prevailing political view that Mau Mau constituted a mere nuisance, albeit a vicious one, that could be put down with ease. This embodies a discernibly rigid approach to counterinsurgency, as opposed to swift adaptation. The only real contribution to the rural campaign was the use of “pseudo gangs.”

Pseudo gangs consisted of surrendered or captured Mau Mau enlisted by the colonial government to hunt down and kill or capture their former Mau Mau comrades. The notion of pseudo gangs was not unique to Kenya and, in fact, had been used in other counterinsurgency operations by the British. However, Kenya provides the most successful example of the employment of such gangs. The method was employed to a lesser extent in Malaya where Special Operation Volunteer Forces composed of captured and surrendered insurgents returned to the jungle to track down their former comrades. However, the use of the pseudo gangs in Kenya has historically received a great deal more attention than in previous conflicts, due in large part to the fact that it represents the most successful example of the employment of such gangs. Initially, reformed Mau Mau were used as trackers or guides for the British Army. They soon become essential for intelligence gathering and for bringing about “contact” with insurgent units in the forest. These early incarnations of pseudo gangs were composed of reformed Mau Mau, loyalist Kikuyu, and white soldiers working together to target Mau Mau leadership. Eventually, British soldiers were removed entirely, and the gangs operated with only minimal colonial supervision.

In June 1954, the pseudo-gang method was officially sanctioned by General Erskine, who strongly advocated the technique to the military hierarchy.<sup>61</sup> In May 1955, Erskine’s successor as commander in chief, Lieutenant General Gerald Lathbury, attempted to increase the use of pseudo gangs by establishing five Special Forces teams, each consisting of 10 ex-insurgents commanded by a British officer, as a manifestation of his belief that pseudo gangs were “the most effective weapon against the terrorists.”<sup>62</sup> As part of the effort to formalize the integration of pseudo gangs as a pillar of the counterinsurgency campaign, Frank Kitson, a field intelligence officer, established the Special Methods Training Centre in 1954 for the express purpose of professionalizing reformed Mau Mau insurgents into capable and reliable allies in the counterinsurgency campaign. According to Kitson, the process for persuading the Mau Mau to

operate in these gangs was to treat them harshly and “put them in their place” initially and then gradually to involve them in the pseudo community at the training center by treating them as friends. Once they could be trusted with performing sentry duty and carrying arms, they were taken on patrol.<sup>63</sup> Ian Henderson of the Special Branch wrote an account of his legendary pseudo-gang effort to track down senior Mau Mau leader Dedan Kimathi. He said that once they were surrendered or captured, former insurgents seem to resign themselves to cooperating with the pseudo gangs, fearful of retribution from their former comrades and of similar treatment at the hands of the authorities should they not prove helpful: “a hostile gang fighting against us yesterday became a tamed gang fighting for us today. We were not exactly converting these desperate men, but we were certainly recruiting them.”<sup>64</sup>

By the end of 1956, the pseudo-gang technique was showing remarkable results in the Kiambu and Thika areas and played a pivotal role in hunting down Mau Mau leaders and members that were captured or killed, at an average of 20 per week.<sup>65</sup> The pseudo-gang concept worked extremely well, not only for targeting Mau Mau operatives, but also in intelligence gathering and counter-leadership targeting. In fact, pseudo gangs accounted for the capture of the vast majority of Mau Mau leaders. Leroy Thompson argued that the reason the pseudo-gang techniques worked so well in Kenya was because of poor command and control between Mau Mau groups, making it extremely difficult for the Mau Mau to tell friend from foe. Moreover, employing former guerrillas in pseudo gangs was a “propaganda coup for the government and an economic strategy for the army.” The colonial government was able to successfully turn guerrilla against guerrilla, and with military and economic support from the British government, the outcome was predictable.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the strategic advantage of pseudo gangs, Andrew Mumford argues that the presence of pseudo gangs and Home Guards extended the intense brutality with which interrogations were undertaken, thus severely undermining the practical value of the “minimal force” doctrine.<sup>67</sup> The doctrine of minimal force was held as one of the central planks of success in Malaya, and as such it seemed natural that along with the breadth of tactical, operational, and strategic ideas that were gradually transferred from Malaya to Kenya in the mid-1950s, a concerted effort would and should have been to uphold and conform to this doctrine. However, it has been argued by Mumford that “only assessments of conduct in Northern Ireland match the Kenya case for indictments of widespread disregard for civilian rights.”<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Thomas Mockaitis described the actions of the colonial government as being indicative of “the ‘Black and Tan’ phenomenon” at work in Kenya, given the excessive force employed by the security forces on suspected insurgents and their

purported supporters.<sup>69</sup> At the epicenter of this criticism lies the treatment of detainees in interrogation camps, the indiscriminate raids and roundups that failed to distinguish Mau Mau from innocent Kikuyu, and the widespread use of capital punishment. In short, the use of excessive force in contrast to the doctrine employed in Malaya perpetuated the cycle of violence and reduced the counterinsurgency campaign's base of support. This lesson, learned slowly by the British government as a whole, was arguably never put into practice in Kenya.<sup>70</sup> In fact, when Major General Hinde first arrived in Kenya, he cited minimum force as an essential component in operations conducted against Mau Mau: "We must heed the example of Malaya and ensure that repressive measures do not result in an unbridgeable gap of bitterness between us and the Kikuyu."<sup>71</sup> However, the prevailing climate of fear led to rampant beatings, torture, and killing by British armed forces and, to a great extent, the Kikuyu Home Guards which ensured that, in Huw Bennet's words, "Fear became a strategic level for combating the insurgency."<sup>72</sup>

### INTELLIGENCE-GATHERING RESPONSE

As early as 1950, when Mau Mau first emerged, the British had begun monitoring the group and attempted to infiltrate it to gather intelligence on its aims, its membership, and its strategic intentions. This intelligence did partially assist in the execution of Operation *Jock Scott*. However, the arrest and trial of high-profile nationalist and trade union leaders who at best had an ambiguous relation to Mau Mau demonstrates how inadequate the intelligence penetration of the group had been.<sup>73</sup> As argued by Randall Heather, the intelligence agencies in Kenya were "woefully unprepared" to face an insurgency: the colonial intelligence structure was fragmented and its agencies were given little attention or resources by colonial administrators.<sup>74</sup> In fact, at the outbreak of the emergency, Kenyan Special Branch consisted of just four colonial officers and very few African rank and file, none of whom were operational in areas dominated by the Kikuyu.<sup>75</sup>

Faced with the pre- and early emergency intelligence failings, newly arrived Governor Sir Evelyn Baring acknowledged the need for fundamental restructuring. In November 1952, Sir Percy Sillitoe, the director general of MI5, recommended the reorganization of the Kenyan intelligence apparatus. Sillitoe's report proposed changes that would bring Kenya in line with the Malayan intelligence system.<sup>76</sup> A national Intelligence Committee was established to centralize collection and analysis, to be chaired by an intelligence advisor and attended by the assistant chief secretary, the assistant commissioner for Special Branch, the Security Liaison Office from MI5, and representatives of the Chief Native Commissioner.<sup>77</sup> This committee reported directly to the governor. Although

Sillitoe's plan of action was heeded, it took some time before any changes were implemented, and even longer before any benefits materialized.<sup>78</sup> Randall Heather has argued that two factors prevented the Kenyan intelligence authorities from learning from the lessons of Malaya in the early stages of the emergency. First, there was a pervasive belief within the colony's political elite that Mau Mau would be defeated quickly and, therefore, did not require intensive intelligence work. Second, there was a desire emanating from London that Kenya was to be treated differently from Malaya and that comparisons between the two conflicts were politically undesirable.<sup>79</sup>

In the early 1953, the intelligence committees were organized according to district and provincial levels. The provincial and district committees included the administration, the police, the Special Branch, and the army to provide a consensus view on a given situation. The Special Branch officer would carry out most of the work as he employed the appropriate staff. As such, these committees served only to disseminate police and Special Branch intelligence and failed to actually address the shortfall in military intelligence that would lead to "contact" with insurgent units, despite the appointment of 52 field intelligence officers in early 1954.<sup>80</sup> To bridge this intelligence gap, Joint Army-Police Operational Intelligence Teams (JAPOITs) were formed in and around Mau Mau strongholds. Moreover, the intelligence gap was also partly filled by the use of the aforementioned pseudo-gang operations. Although these steps represented an improvement over the pre-emergency situation, intelligence collection still remained focused on the political rather than military activities of Mau Mau. However, as the insurgent violence intensified, the need for operational intelligence increased, and the Kenyan intelligence structure continued to be plagued by a lack of cooperation between the military and Special Branch. Noticing this failure, Lieutenant General Lathbury allocated military intelligence officers to Special Branch and ensured that the director of Intelligence Service had to report directly to the director of operations. These reforms were only put in place three years into the emergency, but once in effect, they brought a belated coherence to the process. Frank Kitson, who had previously established the Special Methods Training Centre, noted that the development of actionable intelligence was the most important objective in fighting an insurgency. He believed that the "main tactical job of the company commander" was to gather and synthesize available information.<sup>81</sup> Intelligence was critical to the conduct of a successful counterinsurgency, and those fighting Mau Mau accordingly employed aggressive interrogation techniques to gain information. Senior British officers, interviewed by RAND in 1962, made it clear that intelligence consisted of far more than what was gathered by trained interrogators and from the known insurgents themselves. In fact, both colonels interviewed, John R. Shirley and

Frank Kitson, advocated the gathering and synthesizing of masses of low-level data provided by a large number of low-grade sources. Though this data would require processing, and much of it would be of dubious reliability, in the aggregate it would provide a “mosaic in which the patterns of the enemy activities become discernible.”<sup>82</sup>

The “first intelligence breakthrough of the war” was the capture, arrest, and interrogation of senior Mau Mau leader Warihiu Itote in January 1954.<sup>83</sup> Ian Henderson, a Special Branch officer with a deep knowledge of Kikuyu language and culture—also one of the pioneers of the pseudo-gang technique—interrogated Itote at length, producing an invaluable 44-page report. The report detailed the Mount Kenya Mau Mau’s order of battle, manpower strength, armaments, and objectives. Assessed against other evidence, the interrogation of Itote showed rising popular support for Mau Mau during the preceding four months. Henderson recognized that the prospects of a mass surrender were limited unless additional pressure could be placed on Mau Mau militants. In a deal hatched by Henderson and approved by Governor Baring, Itote was spared the death sentence and agreed to cooperate with colonial authorities. In early February 1953, Baring received British cabinet approval for using Itote as a conduit for establishing top secret discussions with the insurgent leadership.<sup>84</sup> Itote sent 26 letters to senior Mau Mau leaders, imploring them to surrender and explaining the fair treatment he had received from the colonial government.<sup>85</sup> The objective of the Itote scheme was to bring the emergency to a quick end by offering to suspend the death penalty for those who surrendered voluntarily. By August 1953, only 66 Mau Mau had surrendered, while an additional 191 surrendered by June 1954.<sup>86</sup> Despite the initial failure of the Itote scheme, there were major Mau Mau surrenders in 1955 as the government tightened its grip on the insurgents through offensives and on Mau Mau supporters through villagization. These surrender offers, designed primarily to appeal to the reluctant, forced, or wavering insurgency, were approved by General Erskine “as ‘a let out’ to those who had been forced into Mau Mau against their will and had not committed any violent crimes.”<sup>87</sup> They included a double amnesty, whereby surrendered Mau Mau and loyalists alike were immune from prosecution for all crimes committed before January 18, 1955. Following the announcement of the double amnesty surrender scheme, the director of information initiated a two-part campaign—far more extensive than any launched previously. The first part was aimed at informing all Kikuyu about the new terms. This operation succeeded, as many insurgents surrendering over the subsequent weeks carried the government’s leaflets. The second phase, which lasted for the duration of the offer period, appealed to both loyalists and the passive wings in the reserves. A leaflet was distributed in the emergency areas and outlined the offer in English, Kikuyu, and Swahili but warned that

it would not remain open forever. The back of the leaflet was a "safe conduct pass" demanding fair treatment from the security forces for the bearer.<sup>88</sup> However, the amnesties angered the white community, because in John Lonsdale's words, they "thwarted the lust for revenge."<sup>89</sup> The settler community printed their own pamphlets in protests, threatening grim consequences for those who handed themselves in.<sup>90</sup> In the end, the double amnesty scheme succeeded in securing the surrender of 815 insurgents by January 1955, and they, in turn, offered an intelligence goldmine in terms of revealing the size, movements, and operational intentions of their former units.<sup>91</sup>

As is typical with successful counterinsurgency campaigns, the Mau Mau insurgency did not end with a formal surrender. Because there was no clear Mau Mau organizational structure to conduct a surrender, the end of the conflict was imprecise. Many agree, however, that the capture of Dedan Kimathi, the last major Mau Mau unit leader on October 21, 1956, symbolized the ultimate defeat of the Mau Mau and marked the end of the campaign.<sup>92</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Kenya emergency lasted almost exactly four years, from its proclamation in October 1952 to the capture of the last significant Mau Mau leader in October 1956. In describing the course of the emergency, this chapter has examined how the British colonial administration responded to the specific challenges raised by the insurgency.

The pressure on traditional tribal land was reduced through a conscious effort to move from traditional communal ownership to a system based on three distinct classes that promoted land tenure. Certainly, the villagization campaign sought to isolate Mau Mau and deny the rebels access to food and other resources, which, taking land away from the rebels, struck at the very core of their traditional values. It also worked to lay the foundation for a different system of land ownership, one in which the Kikuyu could maintain their ancestral domains.

As the rebellion evolved, it became clear that it consisted of two distinct elements. There was a rural campaign in which Mau Mau sheltered in the dense forests, a campaign that was familiar to the British because of their experiences in Malaya. The lessons of Malaya could be applied to that rural campaign relatively easily though not always exactly. On the other hand, there was also an urban campaign of resistance in cities such as Nairobi. In response, the British launched Operation *Anvil*, which isolated Nairobi for a month while security forces went through district by district, identifying those suspected of opposition. As a result, approximately half the city's Kikuyu population was either arrested or deported.

Such drastic measures risked alienating the Kikuyu in Nairobi: certainly support for Mau Mau subsequently rose in Embu and Meru. The net effect of the operation, however, was to reduce gang activity in the city and disrupt Mau Mau supplies and recruitment. *Anvil* was the single largest urban security operation in British history up to that point, but it was deemed an overall success and set the stage for subsequent similar operations in Aden and Northern Ireland.

A key challenge in combatting any insurgency is to differentiate between the enemy and everyone else, isolating opponents and securing the support or at least the acquiescence of the remaining population. In this case, the British were somewhat less effective. Drastic measures such as Operation *Anvil* pushed some hitherto neutral parties into the arms of Mau Mau. On the other hand, as the campaign progressed, the British became increasingly effective at denying food and resources to the insurgents. Resettlement and villagization played an important role as did taking land away from Mau Mau supporters and the construction of tracks into the dense forest where Mau Mau sheltered. In the end, cut off from their land and their base of support, Mau Mau withered and disappeared.

In pursuing its strategy, the colonial administration was confronted with the challenge of stretching its limited resources in a way that brought the battle home to the enemy. Initially, it emphasized rehabilitation and reintegration: convincing opponents that they faced a better future through collaboration with the government. It created Kenyan Home Guard units to supplement British troops and protect other groups. And the Imperial General Staff did dispatch additional units to Kenya to strengthen the overall effort.

Ultimately, however, the problem of limited resources was most effectively addressed through the use of the pseudo gangs that proved remarkably effective in turning former opponents into active combatants in the fight against Mau Mau. Deployment of the pseudo gangs signaled the end of an earlier strategy of minimal force and initiated a period in which the gangs were frequently accused of excessive brutality. Explaining what inducements were offered and why former Mau Mau supporters were willing to switch allegiances is an interesting question that deserves more study.

Finally, when the insurgency began, the colonial administration had extremely limited intelligence capabilities. When it became clear that the rebellion would not be defeated quickly, the entire intelligence effort was restructured by Sir Evelyn Baring. Additional officers were assigned, the collection and analysis of data was centralized though the network was extended out into the provinces and districts, collaboration was enhanced between intelligence, and in all the security services, including the pseudo gangs, a new emphasis was placed on gathering military intelligence, and there was an effort to aggregate low-level data to discern

bigger patterns in insurgent activity. Finally, when militant leaders were captured, they were offered amnesties in return for collaboration. Not only did this provide additional intelligence, but it provided an incentive for other militants to follow suit. Eventually, these measures began to have the desired effect in undermining Mau Mau.

Overall, the British were slow to recognize the seriousness of the insurgency and thus delayed in implementing effective responses. At the beginning, they appointed officials with insufficient authority to pursue the campaign effectively. Inadequate intelligence capabilities led to a misreading of local attitudes and conditions: for example, the colonial administration erroneously assumed that the Kikuyu-born Jomo Kenyatta was a Mau Mau supporter and was late in building on his Kenya-wide appeal. At the outset, many operations were called off prematurely if they did not yield immediate results. Limited resources were supplemented by local troops, and the urban-rural divide and tribal divisions were exploited, all of which had a longer-term effect on Kenya once it had achieved independence. On the other hand, the authorities did overcome their slow start, devised effective methods to limit the appeal of Mau Mau and isolate the insurgents, and eventually adopted an effective way of opening up tracks into the forests to attack the insurgents where they sheltered.

It is obvious that the colonial administration pursued several different strategies in parallel. It was the combination of many different threads that ultimately made the campaign successful. Some strategies were based on previous imperial experience. Some were derived from the contemporaneous Malayan emergency that occurred virtually at the same time, though the exact applicability of strategies that worked in Malaya to a totally different type of conflict remained questionable. And some responses, such as the use of pseudo gangs, were improvised on site. Overall, ongoing restructuring of the leadership eventually produced a centralized command better able to pursue a coherent and coordinated strategy.

The Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya is an example of the conflicts that inevitably accompanied the winding down of the colonial era. It occurred in a situation already fraught with complex struggles over land, economic development, social status, and political representation—struggles involving a bewildering kaleidoscope of local tribes, white settlers, imported Indian laborers, veterans of the colonial service, and the Colonial Office in London.

Exhausted by World War II and assailed by rising challenges throughout the empire, the United Kingdom had limited resources to devote to Kenya: that may be one reason that it initially preferred to minimize the Mau Mau threat and delayed dispatching a more robust response.

Beyond that, however, was a more fundamental cost-benefit calculation: just how much would be required to maintain order and would the effort be worth it? There was, of course, a general sense of obligation to the white settlers who had originally been encouraged to invest in Kenyan agriculture and to the native Kenyans for which Britain had assumed responsibility. Clearly, the first priority was to restore security, though at an acceptable cost. As the 1950s progressed, however, it had to be clear to most that there was no return to earlier colonial arrangements. The pressures for change from a variety of other African independence movements were simply too powerful to ignore, and the overriding emergent hope was for an orderly transition to the new era.

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