

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT OF THE MAU-MAU REBELLION

by

Lieutenant Colonel Robert M. Eatman
United States Air Force

Dr. Steven Metz
Project Adviser

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ABSTRACT

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This paper is a strategic assessment of Kenya's Mau-Mau rebellion in the middle of the 20th century. Major strategic players include the Kikuyu tribe, from where the Mau-Mau insurgents sprang, the British government and the Kenyan colonial government. An historical overview concludes with the Mau-Mau insurgency's eventual defeat, with Kikuyu success in gaining independence from Britain just a few years after the insurgency was defeated. A study of Mau-Mau, British and Kenyan colonial government strategies includes an analysis of challenges facing each. Of note, the British and Kenyan governments faced many of the same challenges the United States is now facing in the so-called Global War on Terror, just as the British did when they successfully defeated insurgencies in South Africa and Malaya in the 20th century. The paper concludes with suggestions for future study in the area of counterinsurgency.

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT OF THE MAU-MAU REBELLION

Historical Overview

A western government is slow to recognize and acknowledge a growing insurgency. Terrorists who brutally murder westerners and western sympathizers in their country. Government response includes torture, to which the government responds by investigating, punishing offenders relatively mildly, and arguing that terrorists are not covered by the Geneva Conventions. Tens of thousands of suspected insurgents spend time in government detention camps. Arguments are made that the conflict may be a civil war rather than an insurgency. Military forces work with national police and conduct door-to-door sweeps of the nation's capital. Iraq in the early part of the twenty-first century? No. Kenya in the mid-twentieth century. It may be true that there truly is nothing new under the sun. Though different from the insurgency in Iraq, in at least as many ways, the two conflicts are similar, from tactics to strategy.

The Mau-Mau rebellion took place in Kenya from 1952 to 1960 and though the British and Kenyan colonial governments succeeded in defeating the insurgency, it sowed the seeds for the eventual end of colonial rule and Kenyan independence only three years after the Mau-Mau were defeated.¹ It represents one of the times a western power defeated an insurgency and, as such, is worthy of study as one of three times the British successfully put down a rebellion in the 20th century, the Malayan and Boer insurgencies, as well as the conflict in Northern Ireland providing additional examples.

British colonialism of Africa began in earnest in the mid-late nineteenth century. At one time the British Empire covered roughly one-fourth of the earth's surface and it was said "the sun never sets on the British Empire." Significant colonial acquisition in southern and eastern Africa included Kenya beginning in 1887 and Britain retained colonies in Africa until 1980 when the British left Zimbabwe-Rhodesia.²

The roots of Kikuyu discontent were sown through British colonial dominion of the indigenous tribes. During the first decade of the twentieth century the colonialists established their preeminence. The most productive agricultural land was set aside for European settlers and became known as the White Highlands.³ Even when natives owned or farmed fertile land the Colonial Legislative Council denied their requests to be allowed to grow the most profitable crop, coffee.⁴

Adding to the natives' grievances were religious pressures from the Christian missionaries. The missionaries brought education and religion and many Kikuyu converted to Christianity. The missionaries, however, were intolerant of those Kikuyu traditions and saw

them as conflicting with Christianity. Sons who became Christians were forbidden by the church from participating in “heathen” ceremonies important to their fathers.⁵ Further, the missionaries condemned polygamy and the tribal tradition of clitorrectomy of the young women. Even though the natives could find no prohibitions on either clitorrectomy or polygamy⁶ this dichotomy placed many natives in a sort of no-man’s land; not fully Kikuyu and not fully Christian.

Hughes included in his study a quote from Captain Meinertzhagan’s of the King’s African Rifles diary in which he accurately predicted the potential rebellion almost fifty years before it began:

I am sorry to leave the Kikuyu... they are the most intelligent of the African tribes I have met; therefore, they will be the most progressive under European guidance and will be more susceptible to subversion activities. They will be one of the first tribes to demand freedom from European influence and in the end cause a lot of trouble.⁷

After World War II, nearly 100,000 Kenyan natives who fought on behalf of the British were released from service to begin new lives in Kenya. Lapping points out they had served side-by-side with British soldiers and “had seen for the first time [the British] as no more than equals” and this “made them a dangerous, volatile group.”⁸ Unemployed and underemployed Kikuyu in the low income areas now had time and the inclination to listen to inflammatory political speeches from more highly educated tribesmen. Though in many cases the listeners could not fully appreciate the lofty concepts and ideals of equality, independence, labor rights, and African nationalism, 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.⁹

As early as 1948, the British colonial administration was awash in reports from both settlers and natives regarding a new anti-government movement called the Mau Mau. The Director of Intelligence and Security confirmed the reports and submitted his own claiming the Mau Mau was related to a previously outlawed group called the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA). By 1951 it was clear even to the British government in England that all was not well in Kenya. Colonial Secretary Griffiths visited Kenya to review the constitution for suggested changes that might mollify the discontented Kikuyu. Upon his arrival, Jomo Kenyatta, a former member of the KCA and the current president of the Kenya African Union, gave to the secretary a list of grievances and demands. The four demands addressed issues related to racial, economic, labor, and political improvements. All were rejected.¹⁰

Sir Evelyn Baring was sworn in as the new Governor of Kenya in 1952 and began his assignment with a ten day tour of the country. Subsequent to his inspection, having heard and

seen evidence of the native rebellion, he submitted his report to the British government requesting that a state of emergency be declared and military forces be sent to help deal with the Mau Mau. The Kenyan Legislative Council immediately followed up by enacting laws that restricted free movement, controlled the press, and required registration of “societies” with ten or more members, all aimed at controlling the insurgents. Within three weeks of his arrival Sir Evelyn signed the state of emergency decree.¹¹

On the same date the state of emergency was declared, the Royal Air Force brought in British soldiers from the Suez Canal. By the next day, the soldiers were visibly patrolling the capital, Nairobi, in a show of force aimed at appeasing the public’s need to feel secure.¹² This initial display of forces combine with police-led and military-supported round up and arrest of suspected Mau Mau was termed Operation Jock Scott. Hughes opined that Operation Jock Scott did two things in addition to making the European population feel a bit more secure. It drove Mau Mau adherents out of Nairobi and into the Kenyan forests and it surprised the Mau Mau before they were able to actually organize for any sort of truly large scale rebellion.¹³

Though the short operation resulted in the arrest of nearly 200 people, it was not enough to quell the growing Mau Mau movement. As evidence of its failure, shortly after the operation, a Kikuyu chief trying to break up a Mau Mau oathing ceremony was brutally murdered. To further prove that point within a month of the end of Operation Jock Scott, the rebels killed their first white Kenyan in his farmhouse.¹⁴ The insurgency continued with ebbs and flows until late 1956. During those years the Mau Mau terrorized the European and native populations, though the bulk of their attacks, and subsequent fatalities, were borne by the Kikuyu people themselves.

Defeat of the Mau-Mau, as is typical with a successful counterinsurgency, did not end with a formal surrender. As there was no formal Mau Mau surrender, nor enough formal Mau Mau organizational structure to conduct a surrender, the end of the conflict was not precise. That said, more than one author opined the capture of Kimathi, the last Mau Mau major unit leader, on 21 October 1956 symbolized the defeat of the Mau Mau. The rebellion, from 1948 to 1956, according to government statistics, accounted for the deaths of 167 colonial/British security forces, of which 63 were European; 1,879 loyal civilians, of which only 32 were European; and 11,503 Mau Mau killed.¹⁵

In December 1963, Britain granted Kenya her independence and Jomo Kenyatta became the first Kenyan president, a position he held until his death in 1978.¹⁶ Of credit to the Kenyan people and their leaders is the fact that their transition to independence from colonialism was among the most stable in Africa.

Strategies

Mau Mau. Wade Markel asserts that though the Mau-Mau's desired end-state was colonial expulsion they had no political replacement in mind once the British departed. Neither, according to Markel, did the Mau-Mau have "even a strategy for ejecting them."¹⁷ It seems only that the Mau-Mau disliked, for a variety of reasons, British rule and were convinced life would be better without the colonial government in place. Some Kikuyu undoubtedly believed the manifestations of wealth they saw with the colonialists would somehow be theirs once the ruling colonialists were deposed and forced out of Kenya. They did not, however, begin with a campaign plan, grand strategy, or approach beyond terrorizing colonialists and their own tribesmen and other native Kenyans. From 1952 to early 1953 Maloba asserts the Mau Mau had no centralized organizational framework and thus their military and political efforts were effectively delinked and unsynchronized. "The result was seven months of random, intimidating violence and general confusion"¹⁸ conducted by loosely organized small groups of Mau Mau. According to one author, the disorganization was so acute that a Mau Mau leader, General China, was unaware of another large group of Mau Mau operating in another part of the country.¹⁹ Some argue as well that the Mau Mau failure to articulate a coherent end-state with attainable goals to their constituents contributed to their failure to mobilize the population who grew to hate and fear the Mau Mau even more than the British colonialists.²⁰

Glazier's CONFIDENTIAL 1967 analysis, Kenya: The Termination of the Mau Mau, one of several case studies on the "termination of internal revolutionary conflict" completed for the Department of Defense described the insurgency and the Mau Mau as "...that of an aggregate of discontented individuals whose goals were so varied and whose educational level was so low that the group had no specific political objectives..." Smaller group of so-called elite refugees from mass relocations, forced by the government, were sometimes able to provide some level of leadership to Mau Mau in the forests.²¹

By March 1953, the Mau Mau were beginning to show the limited ability to organize and coordinate their efforts. Groups of Mau Mau formed "clusters" in the forest areas. They were able to pool resources such as ammunition. Formal organization, in May, resulted in the formation of the Nyeri district Army and Council. Six of the camp cluster leaders were given the rank of general, borrowing military nomenclature from their colonial enemy.²² These generals, however, did not command in the conventional sense of the word and their efforts were not subordinate to a particular hierarchy. Dedan Kimathi, thought by British and colonial forces to be a key Mau Mau leader, hosted the Mwathe meeting in August of 1953 which brought together insurgent leaders to try and gain their allegiance and subordination to a country-wide

alliance. The effort at building a formal alliance failed. Military leaders were unwilling to give up their independence and pledge themselves and their followers to another. The meeting did, however, result in the formation of eight military districts/sectors with “field armies” committed to the same struggle but not to any particular united and coordinated strategy.²³ This lack of country-wide unity was a defining characteristic of the Mau Mau throughout the insurgency.

Public Support. As is the case with other insurgencies, support of, or at least noninterference with, the rebels is critical to their success. The Mau Mau made a conscious effort to maintain the loyalty of its adherents and supporters while sowing fear amongst those who dared to, or even considered, supporting the government fight against them. Support for the active wing, the actual Mau Mau insurgents, was carried out by the so-called passive wing made up natives in the villages, native reserves and countryside. They were nominally organized into committees of less than ten people responsible for providing food, weapons and ammunition, and cash,²⁴ to operational Mau Mau who tended to work in small teams of five to fifteen members making use of an insider.²⁵ Clearly, without these support networks the rebellion would have died far more quickly.

Because an insurgency requires, as Mao Zedong describes, a sea of people in which the insurgents/guerillas move without detection, it was critical to the Mau Mau that they garnered members’ fidelity and established that sea of people in which to move safely. Mau Mau members and supporters took part in various forms of oathing ceremonies to bind them to the cause and ensure their continued loyalty. These oaths or at least some of them, played upon native tribal superstitions and customs and involved cannibalism, breaking sexual taboos, and all guaranteeing the death of an oath-taker breaking the oath and betraying the Mau Mau.²⁶ Additionally, they frequently killed those in villages who they believed had betrayed them. Local “district elimination squads” were tasked to kill traitors and government sympathizers. This was one area where the decentralized nature of the insurgency worked to the Mau Mau’s benefit. Because they lived and operated in their local tribal areas, they were “able to isolate traitors and eliminate them quickly. A national police report in 1954 detailed, among other things, that “murders of loyal tribesmen was almost an everyday occurrence.” In one well-publicized case, the “Lari massacre,” where Mau Mau members claimed they were only targeting the chief and other colonial loyalists, several dozen villagers were killed.²⁷ The point was well made that cooperating with the colonial government was not tolerated by the rebels.

Oddly enough, though the aim of the insurgency was independence from colonial rule, the targets of the Mau Mau were far more often fellow tribesmen and only occasionally the

Europeans they sought to expel. Similarly, the Mau Mau never made an attack on the rail system or government offices.

The Kenya forests provided a base area for the Mau Mau to survive. Hughes opines that the Kikuyu, a relatively peaceful tribe that formed the overwhelming majority of Mau Mau membership, had for generations lived in close proximity to forests and fled to them to avoid and entrap more warlike tribes.²⁸ In the rugged country they found relative security from British operations.²⁹ They were able to forage for food, though as they were pressured into smaller areas of the forest their foraging trips made them easier to capture or kill. This isolation, however, made it more difficult for the Mau Mau to access their support base found in the cities and villages and necessitated trips outside of the forests. These trips between safe havens and populated areas exposed them to the colonial forces.

British. There is a fine line between strategic and operation approaches just as there is a similar faded boundary between the operation and tactical realms. This paper crosses those lines as necessary to explain the British and colonial strategy.

Kenyan colonialists' desired end-state was essentially a return to the previous status-quo with them firmly and in sole control, economic well-being, and safety. As British colonialists, the white Kenyan's were backed by the British Army with considerable experience overseas against natives insurrection. Further, the Army brought with it great organizational capacity, flexibility, and adaptability; all skills crucial to defeating an amorphous insurgency.³⁰

The British strategy in Kenya was, at least at the strategic level the same strategy that successfully defeated the insurgency in Malaya: "draining the swamp."³¹ That strategy, however, took some time to develop. As is often the case with insurgency, the government was slow to recognize the seriousness of the situation and the magnitude of the threat.³²

Early strategy was aimed at calming the colonial public and showing some level of action and effort aimed at the Mau Mau. It was becoming clear there was a growing insurgency and the government needed to show it was doing something about it. Through 1953 patrols were aimed, primarily, at surprising Mau-Mau insurgents while simultaneously "showing the flag" and strengthening the morale of those groups resisting the Mau-Mau. In concert with and supporting military efforts were government restrictions on Kikuyu and other tribes. For example, it became illegal for motor vehicles to have more than one Kikuyu occupant.³³

The British were fortunate in that they had willing volunteers in the colonial population who were eager to fight the Mau Mau. The Kenya Police Reserve, for example, was made up primarily of World War II police volunteer veterans. They were called up for the contingency and served throughout the campaign at remote posts in Kenya. Further, the white Kenyans

organized their own volunteer militias, called Farm Guards, to combat Mau Mau and provide mutual support amongst the farms. These militia volunteers, made up of professional hunters and others with varying degrees of bush experience were assisted by the Kenya Police Reserve who would respond to prearranged signals of distress such as flares.³⁴

Intelligence Gathering. As is true with other insurgencies, rebellions, and indeed any conflict where an enemy fights without recognizable uniform or order of battle, intelligence was difficult to come by. Hughes asserts the British began the conflict with little relevant information regarding Mau Mau “organization, disposition, capabilities and intentions” and this made it difficult to develop a coherent counterinsurgency strategy.³⁵ Without detailed intelligence on Mau Mau activities, organization, locations, and tactics the British strategy could have little hope of success. Early British efforts were largely ineffective as a result.

Intelligence can be difficult to garner at the best of times but especially during an insurgency, when the enemy looks just like the population in which he moves. Eventual success against the Mau-Mau hinged upon the breadth and depth of intelligence coupled with efforts to isolate insurgents from their support base. The Police Special Branch, with barely a dozen men including a few native inspectors, covered all of Kenya in the early days of the insurgency.³⁶ By 1953, it was clear to authorities the lack of effective intelligence was crippling counterinsurgency efforts. The British deployed General Sir George Erskine as commander in chief of the colonial forces in Kenya. General Erskine, hand-picked by Sir Winston Churchill, made improving intelligence a high priority. He expanded the Special Branch (intelligence services) under British intelligence officials. Further, he increased manpower by employing field intelligence agents coordinating their efforts through the Special Branch officers.³⁷ This decentralized effort put intelligence collection efforts at ground level where the intelligence “lived.” Shortly after he arrived, General Erskine reported to the colonial secretary “from evidence coming forward from screening teams and the improved intelligence services, it is now clear that Mau Mau is wider spread and deeper rooted than was thought possible even six months ago.”³⁸

The government also made good use of European-Kenyans with considerable cultural and geographical experience in Kenya. In one case, two young sons of European settlers, who had lived in the reserves and spoke the native language fluently, were signed on. They made themselves invaluable to field operations by talking with prisoners, without the cumbersome need for an interpreter, and gathered considerable timely intelligence.³⁹

Pseudo operations. Partnered with effective intelligence were pseudo operations aimed at disrupting and destroying the Mau Mau. Pseudo operations were already being successfully

used in the Philippines to put down the Huk Rebellion. Additionally, the British had already made effective use of pseudo teams in Malaya in much the same way they would eventually use them in Kenya.⁴⁰ British and colonial forces led the effort but, as is often the case with effective counter insurgencies, local national support was critical to success. By 1955 small groups of natives, working on behalf of the colonial government were assessed to be the “most effective weapon” used against the Mau Mau.⁴¹ These units, called “pseudo gangs,” were typically led by colonial officers from the Kenya Regiment, appointed as such for the conflict, and made up of former Mau Mau guerillas. These former insurgents were enthusiastic combatants in the fight against their former Mau Mau compadres and eventually they were trained, and trusted, to operate on their own without colonial leadership. It is interesting to note that defections were almost unheard of with these former Mau Mau. Instead, according to white Kenyans who led them, these former enemies were intensely loyal to the individual officer who interrogated and ‘turned’ them in much the same way they had previously been loyal to the individual leader in their Mau Mau unit. It is also theorized that by 1955 many Mau Mau were able to see the rebellion was losing its momentum and they were eager to end the conflict on the winning side.⁴² Needless to say, the successful employment of former Mau Mau rebels as government fighters was a huge information operations bonus for the colonial forces.⁴³ It brought into question the legitimacy of the Mau Mau cause, undermined confidence in the loyalty of Mau Mau warriors to their own insurgency, and reduced the number of Mau Mau rebels.

Information Operations. The British colonial forces made profitable use of information operations throughout the insurgency with virtually no counter-information campaign on the part of the Mau Mau. It was unclear to this author the degree of conscious information operations vice the nature of the media to concentrate on the more spectacular and entertaining Mau Mau activities and characteristics. Early in the conflict, the media made frequent mention of the Mau Mau “hacking to pieces” the colonists. Similarly, they entertained readers with accounts of depraved Mau Mau oathing ceremonies.⁴⁴ In November 1952, Time magazine printed a two page story on the Mau Mau with a picture of a dead cat hanging from a tree in the forest with the message to locals that collusion with the whites would lead to their death.⁴⁵ Stories such as this in the press engendered little international support for the insurgency. Even inside Kenya, information operations helped erode local support for the Mau Mau. One evening in March 1953, a force of 1,000 Mau Mau, waiting until the local Home Guard was out on patrol, attacked the village of Lari. The coordinated attack resulted in a minimum of 84 casualties and, because the Home Guard was on patrol, the vast majority of the victims were women and children.

Additionally, more than 200 village huts were burned and 1,000 cattle were injured or killed.⁴⁶ After the massacre at Lari, in which the Mau Mau were blamed for all the deaths, public support for the insurgents waned.⁴⁷ An interesting side note to the conflict was the difference in perceptions and reality between Kenyan colonialists and the British population. While actual deaths of colonialists at the hands of the Mau Mau was actually in the dozens, in Britain “it was widely believed that Mau Mau fighters had slaughtered white people in their thousands.”⁴⁸

The battle for Kenya was not being fought as a coalition and Western support was not critical to the counter-insurgency so long as the West also did not interfere. It was not enough for some that a willing press sensationalized the conflict. Maj Gen Hinde, chief military aid to the governor, recommended a centrally controlled propaganda effort designed at the Kenyan population rather than the Western world.⁴⁹ Though a propaganda operation was not mounted, the Mau Mau were never able to successfully put the colonial government at an informational disadvantage.

Separating Insurgents from Support: Operation Anvil . In 1954, the British and colonial forces swept insurgents from the cities and into the forests. The population was screened through the use of hooded Kikuyu informers who would point out Mau Mau to the authorities. Suspected Mau Mau were sent to detention camps.⁵⁰ In parallel, they also established reserves where villagers could both be protected from the Mau Mau and isolated from them so the insurgents could not rely upon them for support. Though the policy of villagization helped remove insurgents from their support base, its execution had unintended effects as well. The unemployed youth in the reserves formed a fertile recruiting base for the Mau Mau to exploit and, according to Hughes, likely led to the all time high membership levels in the Mau Mau approaching 15,000.⁵¹

Strategic Considerations and Applicability for the Strategist

Every conflict is different. The opponents, allies, terrain, political environment, geography, desired end-states, and the like ought to make one suspicious of those who infer that because a particular strategy worked in one particular counterinsurgency it will work as well, or at all, in another. There are so few constants and so many variables. That said there are characteristics of the Mau-Mau counter-insurgency that ought to be considered by strategists determining how they will fight “their” insurgents.

Early Efforts. In Africa it is sometimes said hyenas are most easily killed when they are pups and not once they’ve grown fangs and muscle. The same might be said for insurgencies. Selby, Hughes, and Markel each pointed out that the British and Kenyan colonial governments were slow to recognize the growing signs of a blossoming insurgency.⁵² In fact, it wasn’t until

there were several horrific slayings that the government acknowledged there might be an insurgency at all.⁵³ Even then it took four years from the time initial reports warning of a potential problem before serious efforts were made to quell the then growing insurgency.⁵⁴ The obvious result was the loss of an opportunity to fight the insurgency while it was still in its infancy and before it could safely imbed itself within a sympathetic, if not cooperative, population. In the words of Hughes:

...it appears that once the movement began, the colonial administrative government took far too long to recognize its existence, and longer still to acknowledge its significance. As a result, it appears that the government was ill prepared to deal with the situation, when, at the eleventh hour, insurrection appeared imminent. Apparently, the military option was the only option available by the time, but intelligence did not exist in sufficient quantity or quality to support efficient military operations for nearly two years.⁵⁵

Information operations. There was no evidence that the British or colonial governments conducted deliberate information operations. Instead, the media and its insatiable appetite for sensational news played into the governments' hands. When the Ruck family was brutally murdered in 1953, hundreds of white settlers protested at government offices in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi and the event gained publicity. The media reported the grisly details, complete with pictures. Of interest was that the "coverage was so sensationalistic that anyone who read the press of the period finds it difficult to believe that through 1956 only 52 white civilians were lost."⁵⁶

Intelligence. A British officer with extensive experience in both Malaya and Kenya, Lieutenant Colonel Kitson, saw development of actionable intelligence as the most important objective in fighting an insurgency. Further, he saw the "main tactical job of the company commander" to be gathering and synthesizing available information.⁵⁷ Intelligence being critical to the successful conduct of a successful counterinsurgency, those fighting the Mau Mau employed aggressive interrogation techniques (torture) to gain information about the enemy. This torture was not a secret in Kenya and the authorities generally looked the other way. William Baldwin, an American adventurer serving in the government forces against the Mau Mau in Kenya had this to say:

We...did not delve too deeply into some of the minor illegalities practiced by the Home Guard. So long as we did not find one conniving with Mau Mau, we left them pretty much alone... The indiscretions of the Kikuyu Guard [loyalists] were a small price to pay for their tremendous contribution toward quelling terrorism.⁵⁸

Even when pressure from the British Parliament forced the colonial government to address Kikuyu Home Guard mistreatment of captives, the government in Kenya did not prosecute

offenders out of concern that doing so would damage their loyalist morale. Instead, in 1955 the government offered a general amnesty to both Kikuyu Home Guard from possible prosecution and any Mau Mau who wished to surrender.⁵⁹ This torture and abuse was not limited to native forces, perhaps seen as somewhat primitive and untamed by Western standards. Government forces allegedly tortured as well as otherwise aggressively questioned suspected Mau Mau insurgents.

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. Rather, both colonels with extensive experience in the Mau Mau counterinsurgency advocated the gathering and synthesizing of the “mass of low-level data provided by large numbers of low-grade sources. Though this data would require sifting and much of it would be of dubious reliability, taken in aggregate it would give a “mosaic in which the patterns of enemy activities become discernible.”⁶⁰

Cultural Awareness. The colonial Kenyans had the advantage of many within their numbers who had a relatively clear understanding of the local populations and the Kikuyu tribe in particular. It was helpful in Kenya to know the great role that magic played in the life of tribal Africans. For example, though intelligence might reliably predict an enemy activity on a particular night at a particular place, but if the local witch doctor told fighters the spirits portended failure or bad magic, a planned ambush, raid, or attack would be cancelled.⁶¹ Knowing that the Mau Mau were superstitious and greatly influenced by magic, the colonial forces took advantage of this fact during interrogations. In one case, the police had discovered Mau Mau documents detailing personnel information and weaponry. When interrogators confronted the prisoner with this detailed information about his gang, they managed to convince him they had magical powers and because of that he joined the government as a trusted informer.⁶²

Population Control. The insurgents must be isolated from their support base, the people. This can be done, as was the case in Kenya and South Africa, by isolating the people and radically controlling their movement. It can also be done, as we are trying to do in Afghanistan and Iraq, with the addition of non-physical means such as empowering friendly leaders, rebuilding infrastructure, and improving the people’s way of life.

There appears to be a near constant pull during the counter-insurgency between winning the hearts and minds of the population and controlling that same population while fighting the insurgents. Markel asserts the British success in Kenya “...supports the troubling conclusion that it is control of a given population, and not cultural sensitivity toward it, that was the decisive

aspect of the British practice of counterinsurgency.”⁶³ Similar tactics, though brutal, were successfully used by the British while fighting the Boers in South Africa. Boer civilians were interred in camps that isolated them from the Boer Commandos and deprived the commandos of support. While I don’t pretend this brutal tactic is acceptable, it says something about the effectiveness of cordon operations and physically separating insurgents from the people.

Outside Support. Counterinsurgencies are more easily fought when outside forces are not able or willing to support the insurgency. The British/colonial governments were fortunate in that the Mau Mau insurgents operated solely on indigenous support. Neither manpower, funds, weapons, food, nor other logistics necessary to fuel a sustained violent antigovernment uprising came from outside of Kenya. This fortunate fact made it far more difficult for the Mau Mau to operate and easier for the British to “drain the swamp.” The Mau-Mau rebellion was not only home grown, but home supported as well. Once insurgents were killed, weapons caches were seized, and supporters’ villages were secured and isolated, there was little replenishment. Though securing Kenya’s borders would have been difficult, there was no need for the British to do so. Neither Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, nor Tanganyika supported the Mau-Mau insurgents. Clearly, this simplified the British problem considerably. The insurgents enjoyed no true safe haven. They were able to hide in the vast forests but, even there, were still targeted by British and colonial forces.

Funding. A corollary to denying the insurgents funding and support, of course, is that the government’s own counter-insurgency must be adequately funded and not just in manpower and materiel. Cold hard cash is necessary to influence both insurgents and the population. As Lawrence Cline points out “money in one form or another has been a key component of the campaign.”⁶⁴ Offers of money to insurgents who surrender and lay down their arms, as well as cash to aid in resettlement away from insurgents encourages defection. In cases, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, where insurgent leaders recruit members with cash incentives, anti-insurgency efforts can “up the ante” and provide a combination of cash and alternative employment to induce potential insurgent recruits away from the insurgency.

Knowing the End State. Carl Von Clausewitz said that no one should go to war without the end state in mind and guiding their actions. I further suggest the end state in mind must go beyond simply the end of the war and into what Clausewitz termed the “better peace.” One lesson learned from the Mau Mau insurgency might be that one ought to make certain the counter-insurgency is not only winnable but that the victory is sustainable and even desirable. Though the British and colonial governments decisively defeated the Mau Mau and Kenyan self-rule, the victorious British and colonial rule lasted a mere three years after the Mau Mau defeat.

Three years after the capture of Kimathi Kenya was granted independence; the independence sought by the Mau Mau.

Summary and Recommendations for Further Research

The British defeat of the Mau-Mau in Kenya was just one of several 20th century successful counter-insurgencies conducted by the British. They were also successful in Malaya and South Africa. Of interest to the strategist would be further research into commonalities of successful counterinsurgencies conducted by the British. Additionally, historical comparisons between the environments of these past counterinsurgencies and the current counterinsurgencies in both Iraq and Afghanistan might serve future policy makers and senior military leaders.

Endnotes

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⁷ Ibid. , 9.

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¹¹ Ibid. , 2-3.

¹² Ibid. , 3-4.

¹³ Ibid. , 35.

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³⁸ Ibid.

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⁴⁰ Lawrence E. Cline, "Pseudo Operations and Counterinsurgency: Lessons From Other Countries," *Strategic Studies Institute*, (June 2005), 1-3.

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⁴² Ibid, 94-96.

⁴³ Ibid, 96.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 107-108.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 107.

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⁴⁷ Eric W. Brown, *The Early Days of the Mau Mau Uprising*; available from <http://www.css.neu.edu/home/feneric/maumau.html>: Internet; 3.

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⁵¹ Hughes, 37.

⁵² Selby and Markel, 4.

⁵³ Markel, 37.

⁵⁴ Hughes, 3-4.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

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⁵⁷ Hosmer, 123-124.

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⁶⁴ Cline, 21-22.