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## **‘The Sharp End of the Intelligence Machine’. The Rise of the Malayan Police Special Branch 1948-1955’**

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British colonial policing was a state-organised activity with two key functions: the defence of a colony; a distinguishing feature when compared to the policing of the metropole, and secondly, the maintenance of law and order, security and the peace. During periods of unrest, the notion of deterrence, investigation and punishment gained a higher priority, often blurring the boundaries between punitive and consensual forms of policing. Within the colonial state, the mechanism of intelligence-gathering was held as crucial for the maintenance of order and was the domain of the security services (both civil and military), the police and the colonial administration. Yet the appearance of formally structured and independent Special Branches within each colonial territory emerged comparatively late in the day when compared to other European empires.<sup>2</sup>

Intelligence-led policing within a colonial context gathered momentum after the Second World War. It took serious unrest for the Colonial Office to recognise that police intelligence systems throughout the empire should be over-hauled. These reforms mirrored the longstanding failure to tackle inherent organisational and structural weaknesses within the majority of colonial police forces. Special Branch would ultimately emerge as an alternative and additional source of intelligence-gathering, removed from the Criminal Investigation Departments (CID). As special branch became a necessary tool to assist colonial governments throughout the decolonisation period, so the concept of ‘political policing’ came to the fore, and, the colonial police became more accountable to government. This was certainly true of the Malayan Police Special Branch which replaced the Malayan Security Service (MSS) in 1948. By 1952, this department would become a police intelligence unit independent of CID and once described as the ‘sharp end of the intelligence machine’ and the colonial government’s ‘national security and intelligence organisation’.<sup>3</sup>

With a steady release of material into The National Archives (UK) scholarly interest in imperial and commonwealth history, police and intelligence studies continues to flourish. The Malayan Emergency provides a wealth of material for these research areas and there is a growing and indeed substantial body of material on the Malayan Emergency. Yet the colonial police, and by extension their intelligence branches, have received less attention; primary sources having been often more difficult to secure.<sup>4</sup> This essay will not provide a detailed literature review.<sup>5</sup> The focus here is to engage with new evidence of the organisational changes that occurred and the discussions that took place between the Colonial Office, the Malayan government, the Malayan Police and the wider intelligence community that led to the gradual restructuring of the Malayan Police and its Special Branch. As such it charts the rise of the Malayan Police Special Branch during the early stages of the emergency and its gradual disentanglement from CID and reflects on how police reform was shaped as much by external agencies (the British Security Service ((MI5) and the Colonial Office) as by local considerations.<sup>6</sup> Indeed MI5 played a greater role than is generally recognised in bringing about the disbandment of MSS as revealed in the more recently released material into the National Archives.

The expansion in Western intelligence studies in Asia during the Cold War has provided new and interesting insights into the challenges faced by the British during the era of decolonisation.<sup>7</sup> The Malayan Emergency has generated considerable interest though the role of the intelligence community *per se* has formed a smaller part of this field of study<sup>8</sup> and has often become entangled within surveys of counter-insurgency.<sup>9</sup> Post-war imperial counter-insurgencies were, as Martin Thomas has noted a ‘multi-sided affair’. Counter-insurgency and by extension the whole spectrum of ‘colonial intelligence’, can only really be understood by looking at the workings of the operators of the colonial state as well as those who were involved in an anti-colonial struggle. This approach was taken much earlier by Karl Hack who surveyed the ‘divergent British and Communist stories’ and provided a critical insight into the complexities of what he termed ‘intelligence transformation’, providing a clear base upon which to further the study of colonial intelligence during the Malayan Emergency.<sup>10</sup> Yet the study of police intelligence systems: the Malayan Police and its intelligence branches reflect the far slower pace of scholarly interest in colonial policing.<sup>11</sup> To date an historical analysis of the Malayan Security Service (MSS) and the Malayan Police Special Branch has been undertaken by relatively few scholars; Leon Comber’s thorough survey of the Malayan Police Special Branch remains one of the few works of intelligence and political surveillance within an Asian context.<sup>12</sup>

### **FROM THE MALAYAN SECURITY SERVICE TO THE MALAYAN POLICE SPECIAL BRANCH**

In 1948, a security crisis broke out across the British Empire. In February rioting in the Gold Coast forced the British to reassess their methods of colonial policing and surveillance and then in June a withdrawal from Palestine following decades of bitter struggle; the departure coinciding with the declaration of a state of emergency in Malaya. From this time the British became embroiled in a spate of small colonial wars, which viewed alongside events in Europe such as the coup in Czechoslovakia perhaps suggested evidence of a world-wide Communist offensive.<sup>13</sup> At the time the communist insurgents of Malaya took on the British security forces, the Malayan Police were badly-equipped, poorly-trained and under-staffed and yet provided with a wide range of legislative and security measures. Huge resources were sunk into the ensuing counter-insurgency campaign against the backdrop of a developing Cold War in Southeast Asia. This brought about the rapid development and exploitation of intelligence systems and consequently, the management and dissemination of information and propaganda.

Up until the Second World War few colonies possessed an independent Special Branch as *distinct* from CID. Throughout the empire, provincial and district commissioners shouldered much of the responsibility for supplying the government with the political and security intelligence needed; criminal intelligence was essentially the domain of CID. The Second World War provided an impetus for change and the subsequent development of what would become known as political policing; prompted for example by the need to oversee internment. By 1948, the focus had once again shifted with the appearance of colonial ‘hotspots’ and the business of maintaining imperial security. This in part prompted Arthur Creech Jones, then Colonial Secretary, to recommend that a police advisor be sent to carry out an inspection of all colonial police forces. In particular he felt that the ‘security intelligence machinery’ should be carefully scrutinised. He noted that ‘the Police

Adviser's duties will of course cover the whole field of police work, [though] I am anxious that he should give particular attention to the organisation of security and intelligence services and especially to special branch work in Colonial police forces'.<sup>14</sup> As a direct result came the appointment of the first Inspector-General of the Colonial Police Service, Sir William Johnson. He was tasked with making a whirlwind tour of the colonial constabularies and reporting back to the Colonial Office. Johnson's major criticism was that the police were too overtly militaristic in nature and that there was a lack of formal intelligence systems, namely Special Branch.<sup>15</sup> These findings paralleled Creech Jones's further endorsement of the need for independent police special branches and his suggestion that they work hand in hand with the local 'Defence Security Officers' (or Security Liaison Officers who were MI5's local representatives).<sup>16</sup> In essence recommendations for change had come too late in the day in terms of effectively managing the early stages of the Malayan Emergency.

Malaya was a clear indication to the British of a Cold War offensive. In the first combined intelligence staff summary for the week ending 15 July 1948, the 'enemy's' ultimate objective was described as 'the establishment of a Communist State in Malaya'. Of more immediate concern, the insurgents were perceived as having caused 'the dislocation of the economic life of this country and, in the ensuing chaos, the establishment of Soviet administrations in 'Liberated Areas'. These 'liberated areas', in the first instance, will be confined to the more isolated regions of the country. They then hope to be able to hang on until the war between Russia and the Western Democracies begins. This, they confidently expect, will happen shortly.' With the insurgent strength approximated at any figure between 2200 and 6100, the British were advised to 'destroy the Communist Party organisation in Malaya' as soon as was possible and to ensure that 'the economic life of the country [continued]. This entail[ed] the protection of the rubber and tin industries, of the personnel employed by them, and the maintenance of the confidence of the people in the ability of Government to protect them.'<sup>17</sup>

The Malayan Police Force, however, was not in a position to be particularly effective; blighted by the inadequacy of its intelligence units and by its own establishment, make-up and ethos. Having suffered a virtual decimation of the gazetted ranks during the Second World War, the police had few 'Old Malayan Hands', traditionally appointed on a long service basis. In 1948, this resulted in a large influx of newly recruited officers with little experience of Malaya faced with 'many troubles arising from the disturbed state of the country' and a 'Force faced with inadequate resources [which created] a perilous situation'.<sup>18</sup> More pressingly the prospect of turf wars loomed large. Officers with a long-standing career in the Malayan Police felt their posts to be under threat by the wave of newcomers; 'whilst small importance is attached to their knowledge of the country and its people ... and [that they were] likely to be passed over for promotion and are in danger of having their professional careers arbitrarily terminated.'<sup>19</sup> In particular this criticism was directed at some five hundred ex Palestine police, spearheaded by Nicol Gray their former Inspector-General who became Commissioner of the Malayan Police. By late 1948, seven former Palestine policemen had been appointed to 'superscale' posts, judged by the 'Old Malayan hands' as being 'unfair to men whose work and experience ... gave them equal or better claims.' By the same token, the former Palestine men found their

new colleagues ‘unfriendly’ and the problem was compounded by a slow trickle of ex Indian Police officers and members of the home police.

Prior to this time, the Malayan Security Service (MSS), set up in 1939, had been the principal intelligence unit. The MSS had been established by Arthur Dickinson, Inspector-General of the Straits Settlement Police and staffed with officers seconded from the Malayan and Singapore police forces. Crucially the MSS had been created as a specific branch *outside* the established police structure. Its director, John Dally was more comfortable with the notion of a civil-style security outfit in the mould of the British security service MI5 and one that would be later accused of having been ‘very much a law unto itself’.<sup>20</sup> Dally was described as a difficult character who viewed the MSS as ‘his own separate empire’ outside the police establishment.<sup>21</sup> In the event it became the main intelligence organisation of the British military administration and was operational prior to the Japanese invasion in 1941. At the end of the Second World War, a centralised Criminal Investigation Department (CID) was re-established in Kuala Lumpur, dealing with criminal cases for the Federation of Malaya and Singapore whilst the MSS was responsible for political and security intelligence. On 23 August 1948 the MSS was disbanded and its functions and the bulk of its officers transferred to the tiny Special Branch units housed within CID.<sup>22</sup> By this stage the MSS had apparent weaknesses within both its organisational structure as well as its operational efficiency; having allegedly failed to warn the colonial authorities of the extent of Communist activity in Malaya.<sup>23</sup> Thereafter, the respective Special Branches reported to the Deputy Commissioner of Police in charge of CID Malaya and CID Singapore, providing political intelligence though clearly perceived as the poor relation.<sup>24</sup>

Thorny discussions regarding the future of the MSS had been ongoing for some time. Prior to the emergency, Sir Percy Sillitoe, former colonial policeman and then Director-General of MI5, the Security Services with imperial security responsibilities since the First World War, had written to the Colonial Office repeatedly with his concerns about its role. Sillitoe described how the MSS was technically responsible (as he perceived) for the handling of both security intelligence: ‘(information concerning each subversive, illegal or secret activities as may be detrimental to the defence of the Realm as a whole)’, and, counter espionage: ‘(information concerning foreign or hostile organisations and the detection and control of their agents and activities)’. In terms of security intelligence Sillitoe noted the potential for overlap between a police special branch and a local security service. In Malaya, for example, Security Intelligence Far East (SIFE – an inter-service security organisation controlled by MI5) was the collating centre for all intelligence that affected that region of the empire and commonwealth. Yet in terms of counter-espionage, the security service should have a more dominant role than the police; for example, the police ‘would never consider taking any action against a possible foreign agent before consulting us...’ [MI5]<sup>25</sup> The problem argued Sillitoe was that the MSS had failed to work ‘within its patch ... cutting across MI6 and SIFE’s lines ... and causing considerable confusion’.<sup>26</sup> In practice, any division of responsibilities between MSS and SIFE had become blurred which Sillitoe considered was ‘largely due to the curious position of the MSS in that it is not responsible to the Commissioners of Police, nor has it any executive responsibility and has moved a long way away from the position of the pre-war Singapore Special Branch’.<sup>27</sup> The bottom line, Sillitoe concluded, was that the organisation had been ‘set up unsound’.<sup>28</sup>

During later discussions with the Colonial Office, Sillitoe urged that 'the best remedy lies in the dissolution of the MSS and the transfer of its function to the Police authorities in the two territories' Moreover, he accused Dally of having contributed to this state of affairs, being an overtly 'active' and 'ambitious man' and was doubtful whether he could suitably transferred to another organisation in the future.<sup>29</sup> At this time Sillitoe's views were being backed by the then governor Sir Edward Gent, who in turn argued that the MSS could be transformed into the type of special branch that existed in Britain. What the discussions reveal is that the disbandment of the MSS in August 1948 occurred for more complex reasons than have previously been thought. More recently released files point to prolonged debates regarding the nature of security intelligence *and* the role of 'special branch' between the Colonial Office, MI5, the Malayan government, the Commissioner of the Malayan Police and the head of the MSS. Also raised are theoretical points relating to accountability: considerations of the extent to which an organisation collecting security intelligence can be accountable to the police *as well as* the government, and, the degree of co-operation with other intelligence services.

By late July 1948, it was clear that there was a breakdown of communications between the different intelligence organisations in Malaya and complaints by the GOC of a 'serious lack of battle intelligence in the Federation and the lack of co-ordination between the intelligence staffs of the Army, Air-Force, MSS and CID'.<sup>30</sup> Yet during a meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> July, it had seemed that some agreement would be reached in setting up a central intelligence centre in Kuala Lumpur under the direction of the head of MSS working with CID, Army and Airforce intelligence. This was to the liking of Gray, who had demanded the transformation of the MSS in the form of special branch with a firm 'chain of command' established between it and the commissioner of police. Continual pushing by Sillitoe and Gray, led to a decision to amalgamate the MSS with the Malayan Police CID, on 9 August, leaving the question of Dally's transfer under discussion.<sup>31</sup> One idea mooted was that Dally should take over as head of SIFE, which was soon overturned by Sillitoe who offered the post to Alex Kellar, former security services liaison officer and previous head of Security Intelligence Middle East.

In Malaya meanwhile police intelligence capabilities continued to be described by senior officers as only 'semi independent' and 'grossly understaffed'. Following the disbandment of MSS and creation of a special branch housed within CID, police intelligence was still left with a dual role: crime and security – it was not until 1950 that the special branch could really concentrate on political and security matters alone.<sup>32</sup> Moreover the deployment of Special Branch officers was limited to the capital cities of the Malay States and Settlements only. Morton later noted that 'there was nothing on the ground for the collection of intelligence, no facilities for interrogation, translation, document research, agent running or any of the other processes of counter-intelligence ...'<sup>33</sup> Further reforms would only come about as a direct result of the ongoing security situation and the Malayan Government's repeated pleas to Whitehall for 'an efficient Special Branch; [for] the police had to take a frontline role in providing intelligence and thus needed the resources to do so: the Police are the only force possessing the information and intelligence necessary for the conduct of an underground war'.<sup>34</sup> This was bolstered by a visit from Field Marshal Sir William Slim in October 1949, who advised, in a similar vein to Johnston's earlier

report, that Special Branch required restructuring. He also noted that the dearth of Chinese or British Cantonese-speaking officers hampered Special Branch work.<sup>35</sup> With this in mind Henry Gurney, as colonial governor, personally instructed that Chinese officers should be recruited into Special Branch and invited police advisors from Scotland Yard to oversee their training. MI5 and MI6 were asked provide 'political advisors' to work closely with the fledgling Special Branch.<sup>36</sup>

Even the 1949 police mission requested by Gurney to investigate turf wars taking place within the higher echelons and advise on reform, failed to provide details on how CID and Special Branch could operate more efficiently in the future. Led by Richard L. Jackson, seconded from the Metropolitan Police and Major J. F. Ferguson, Chief Constable of the Kent Police, the visit culminated in a report presented to the Malayan government in 1950, of which barely two pages offered guidance on the structure of CID.<sup>37</sup> Overall it was felt that the quality of detective work undertaken in Malaya was somewhat mixed. Jackson suggested that senior police officers with particular experience of intelligence work should be seconded to Malaya though he was not more specific about the type of intelligence work being referred to and commented only that 'the most suitable man would be one with colonial or Indian experience of conditions similar to those now existing in Malaya'...<sup>38</sup> Despite grumblings from both the Colonial Office and the Malayan government, real change to police special branch was very slow. On numerous occasions it appeared that Creech Jones advised colonial governors in the strongest terms of the necessity to prevent a reoccurrence of events that had occurred in the Gold Coast or Malaya, to bring the metropolitan experience of police intelligence systems to the wider empire to consider:

The present state of efficiency, in numbers, organisation, and equipment, of their Security forces, and to report as soon as possible ... such a review should of course take into account the existence or otherwise of intelligence and special branches. I am aware that in several Colonies progress has recently been made in strengthening these branches, but it may well be that there is still more to be done in improving their efficiency and in applying the experience of metropolitan countries and the methods which have been developed there ... also any arrangements which may have been made for co-operation with the police forces of neighbouring British territories in dealing with security problems ...<sup>39</sup>

Effective containment of the Malayan emergency continued to be hindered too by issues linked to police make-up and accountability. William Jenkin, former Deputy Director of the Intelligence Bureau in India, who became Director of Intelligence in Malaya in 1950 held no police post and by a 'peculiar arrangement' reported directly to the colonial governor rather than the Commissioner of Police. This had certainly slowed down any possible restructuring of Special Branch.<sup>40</sup> On 9 August, in a confidential and personal letter to Gray, Jenkin attempted to defend his position, his relationship to the government and explain his position on police intelligence work. He noted, in terms of the background to recent world events that 'spying and subversive activities of treacherous elements inside the home territories' had been countered with the development of 'existing 'expert' branches [which] have been strengthened or complementary branches have been formed.' In fact Jenkin argued that it was CID who was principally responsible for intelligence gathering *within* a

territory whilst Special Branch dealt with *outside* issues. Crucially though he argued that ‘they have essentially the same function, however, which is the investigation of all kinds of activity which is directed against the safety of the state, its law and order and its security....’ Jenkin saw no need for the disentanglement of Special Branch from CID and nor that he should be directly accountable as a result to the Commissioner of Police.

What is striking here is that the underlying discussion was as much about the real nature of police intelligence work as it was about structure, organisation and accountability. In a note of a meeting with Gray and Jenkin, Gurney made his position clear, explaining that ‘criminal investigation should be a normal and regular function of the intelligence organisation, whether it was called CID or Intelligence Branch’ but clarifying that there was a distinction between criminal and political and security intelligence. He then proposed that both units should be abolished and reorganised from scratch.<sup>41</sup> As late as 1951, therefore, the question of how CID and Special Branch should be re-organised was still not clear to all parties neither had a general consensus of opinion been reached.<sup>42</sup>

The waters were muddied still further when Gray left his deputy, Robinson in charge of the police during a visit to Britain early in 1951. As acting commissioner, Robinson, at Jenkin’s clear instigation, attempted to tackle the CID-Special Branch debacle, issuing two orders which effectively separated general intelligence work from criminal investigations. This made the Director of Intelligence responsible ‘to the Federal Government alone rather than the Commissioner of Police’. As it transpired Jenkin’s inspiration for a so-called police intelligence bureau was aided by the fact that Robinson had served with him previously in India. The outcome provoked fury from both Gray and Gurney. They perceived the authority of the Commissioner of police to be at stake and urgently requested that the orders be rescinded. Gurney also noted that Jenkin was trying to introduce ‘the fundamentally Indian Police Intelligence System’ which would ‘create suspicions that we were trying to build an organ of the British Intelligence Service working for agencies other than the Government and people of Malaya.’<sup>43</sup> As a result both Jenkin and Robinson announced their resignations – Jenkin’s for the second time in twelve months. The future of Special Branch was still not entirely clear neither had the nature of its role nor its structure been fully entirely clarified.

## **BUILDING AN INDEPENDENT SPECIAL BRANCH**

Indeed it was not until the following year that the management of the political, military and intelligence aspects of the emergency gathered pace following the murder of Gurney and subsequent arrival of General Sir Gerard Templer. As high commissioner and GOC, he believed that intelligence was an absolute priority declaring that ‘The emergency will be won by our intelligence system.’<sup>44</sup> Templer, who had previously been Director of Military Intelligence in the War Office, had predicted a Malayan emergency scenario and was keen to make up for lost time. He was also clear on two key issues: the primary player within the whole intelligence machinery both at a central and operational level would be Special Branch headed by an Assistant Commissioner of police. This necessitated Special Branch’s ultimate move away from CID. To avoid any overlapping of interests or conflict with the army, military intelligence officers would work under the direction of senior Special Branch officers.<sup>45</sup> Secondly, the Director of Intelligence (DOI) would report directly to

Templer, and, be responsible for the overall co-ordination of intelligence (police and military).<sup>46</sup> The post went initially to Jack Morton and then to Guy Madoc in 1954 who was replaced as head of Special Branch by Claud Fenner. Templer was clear that it was only through effective intelligence-gathering and collation that an effective counter-insurgency campaign could be undertaken. Morton's brief was to ensure that Special Branch acquired the right status and that overall organisational capability for the collection, collation, analysis and dissemination of intelligence was achieved. These duties were clearly laid out in the Special Branch charter.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile the regular police came under further scrutiny and Templer saw that further reform was needed to ensure they could offer effective back-up. Initially Templer relied on Gray who, as a former Scots Guards officer, had encouraged military solutions to meet policing requirements: for example he had supported police involvement in the wider counter-insurgency campaign through their deployment to jungle companies. Gray though was replaced in 1952 (having ironically come under some criticism for his 'commando style' policing) by Arthur Young on loan from the City of London Police. Young, the archetypal British bobby held a firm belief that civil methods of policing worked best; his only previous colonial experience having been in The Gold Coast where he had implemented police reform. In complete contrast to Gray, Young was keen to instil the notion of 'hearts and minds' within police practice and encourage the police to work more closely with the community. Young introduced, for example, an early form of community-based policing known as 'Operation Service', which he believed would allow the Malayan Police to become genuine public servants. Young though was also interested in the development of police intelligence systems and bolstered Templer's support of Special Branch; the continuing reform to its organisational and operation structure. Two Special Branch and CID Training schools (one at Sentul, Selangor and one at Salak South, Kuala Lumpur) had previously been set up by Jenkin in 1951, along with a centre for interrogation, though the professional rivalry with Gray at the time had precluded any improvements being undertaken. Young too supported Madoc in his attempts to re-energise both schools training programme which was by early 1953 deemed a success: With sufficient training and personnel, and an emphasis on its 'communist section', Special Branch was able to concentrate on clearly defining the structure of the Malayan Communist Party, as well as identifying their leaders and to gain a clearer picture of the military offensive. By the end of 1953, Special Branch, in collaboration with Chinese affairs and military intelligence officers, had constructed a fairly comprehensive picture of the communist organisation. The relationship between the military and the police intelligence units was by this time a symbiotic union whereby the military patrols would locate and collect intelligence, turn it over to the police so that they could collate and decipher the information, and then redistribute the intelligence reports back to the military units.<sup>48</sup>

As the Malayan Police Special Branch gained in operational efficiency, so it was able to contribute to the management of the counterinsurgency campaign. When colonial police forces operate within a counter-insurgency situation the relationship between consensual and coercive policing becomes all important. Within a colonial state, the extent and type of control impacted upon the degree to which the local population would *consent* within the political arena in the short to long term. The manner in which the police can use forceful and/or collaborative tactics in their dealings with the local communities to enable consensual policing can depend on the degree of reliable

intelligence obtained. This requires a close working relationship between Special Branch and the regular police in the first instance, and, by extension the military and greater security network. In bolstering intelligence-gathering and counter-insurgency capabilities, police officers continued to join Special Forces which would become known as jungle companies. The idea for this auxiliary force had been mooted around the time that discussions were underway about the future of special branch in 1948.

## **POLICE JUNGLE COMPANIES**

Gray was clearly in favour of the creation of special units and discussed this with the colonial governor following his arrival in Malaya. Besides the police was a readily available armed force for paramilitary use. In a telegram dated 12 July 1948, Gurney had explained to Creech Jones about the proposed creation of two new security 'forces': a 'frontier force' and a "Jungle" Force specially trained to attach guerrillas in the jungle'. The GOC had agreed that each jungle 'unit' would be raised under emergency regulations, would recruit candidates with an ability for jungle warfare and they would then receiving training at Port Dickinson. Importantly each unit would be officered by ex-Force 136 officers, the force itself given the code name FERRET.<sup>49</sup> The Colonial Office was keen to 'make use of men who worked in the resistance movement during the war ... to ensure that all the local information about bad men, Communists, guerrillas etc. is put to the fullest use'.<sup>50</sup> Force 136 had been part of a special unit which operated behind Japanese lines in Burma and Malaya during the Second World War and 'established relations with the very Malaysians now 'being hunted''.<sup>51</sup> Each of the three groups of fifty to sixty officers would be commanded by John Davis, Robert Thompson and Hannah [first name not given]. Davis had previously been an SOE operative and 'the first man put in by submarine at the end of 1943 or at the beginning of 1944' and it was assumed that he had remained in touch with operatives who had worked within the 'Resistance Movement'.<sup>52</sup> The existence of Ferret Force was to be kept 'top secret to ensure that the groups were able to 'locate and destroy insurgent elements who are taking cover in jungle country [and] to drive such elements into open country where they can be dealt with by regular Army and police units'. Ferret Force was only operational for a short, albeit highly successful period and by November 1948 had been disbanded.<sup>53</sup> Yet it was the forerunner to the jungle companies that comprised members of both the army and the police.

That the police would serve in 'special' units, often alongside the military, was not a new concept and had been previously tried and tested in Palestine. There was, however, opposition to this concept with complaints that the Malayan Police was 'ceasing to be a Police Force and [was] becoming a paramilitary organisation ...'. The reality, of course, was that colonial police forces had always provided both semi-military and civil policing functions throughout the empire. This was never truer than when faced with conflict during the period of decolonisation. The Malayan emergency had necessitated 'time and attention to jungle operations and other anti-bandit measures, and the claims of ordinary police work [had] been subordinated to these more urgent claims...'. Yet the problem as it was perceived was that: 'In jungle operations the functions of a policeman are similar to those of a soldier; in ordinary police work they are dissimilar ... the functions of a policeman in ordinary times are to preserve the peace and in doing so to use the minimum of force: he must avoid the use of force if possible, and if force is unavoidable, he must use no more than is

necessary. While he must be firm and resolute, he must be cautious and not impulsive. ... The contrast between that bent and the attitude of mind required for war-like objectives is such that training for jungle operations can do little or nothing to develop the habits of thought and action required for ordinary police work... ' <sup>54</sup> This was illustrative of the dichotomy of colonial policing: in theory considered that it should function along civil lines though in practice often necessitating a semi-military approach in order to maintain the colonial state.

The jungle companies continued to expand. During Young's brief leadership and restructuring of the Malayan Police creating five new branches: including B branch (operations, police jungle companies, auxiliary and special constables); D branch (CID) and E Branch (Special Branch), provisions were made for additional police strike or jungle force. With the police and army contributing to this programme there were about two hundred and fifty by 1949, with ten to fifteen officers per squad. The policing cohort became the nucleus of the Police Field Force which would number approximately three thousand officers. Receiving only five month's training at the depot, the officers learnt police duties as well as fighting tactics and the use of weapons. They also received instruction at the Jungle Warfare School set up in 1953 at Kota Tinggi. With the increased intelligence flow, the army was able to hand over areas of jungle to the police for their direct control and to their contribution in the building of jungle forts. <sup>55</sup> This in turn necessitated repeated recruitment drives to secure the transfer of officers from other colonial police forces and the home forces to serve either in CID or Special Branch to ensure regular intelligence collection and dissemination. Under the provisions of the Police (Overseas) Services Act, 1945, and Police Pensions Regulations, British officers could be transferred from the Metropolitan Police in the same manner as if they were transferring to another UK police force. <sup>56</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Overhauling police intelligence systems and creating independent special branches across the British Empire did not occur until the aftermath of the Second World. Colonial governments were not prepared for the crisis of decolonisation that took hold in 1948 and were initially badly served by inadequate or non-existent police special branches as effective security and political intelligence providers. Special Branch units were typically embedded within CID until the 1950s, when a hasty disentanglement and restructuring was brought on with the changes in policing priorities that occurred as a territory neared independence. The Colonial Office at this time theoretically aspired to civil-style police reforms to bring colonial police forces in line with their metropolitan counterparts as advocated by Johnson in his 1948 report. Moreover the view held was that police were more efficient than military in terms of their management of civil unrest and in building trust and cooperation with local communities which relied heavily on intelligence. During the Malayan emergency, for example, the implementation of 'hearts and minds' policing policies through Operation Service was an attempt, albeit limited, to prevent any further alienation of the Malayan, Indian and Chinese communities. Policing in reality though depended upon practical operational considerations which necessitated a reinforcement of semi-military policing styles and newer forms of counter-insurgency

policing as demonstrated by the police jungle companies. The boundaries between consensual and coercive policing became blurred as the Malayan Police were faced with a myriad of duties with an emphasis upon semi-military policing.

Within the overall expansion of the Malayan Police, the reform of its Special Branch became a priority. Yet this undertaking was a complicated procedure revealing differences of opinion between internal and external agencies with regard to both the nature and role of police intelligence work. It also demonstrated more generally how any real organisational or structural changes to colonial police reforms, and by extension their intelligence systems, was prompted by a serious crisis as was the case in both Malaya and the Gold Coast. Indeed the response from colonial governments to Creech Jones' request in 1949 that the Malayan (and Gold Coast) experiences be applied to the reform of police intelligence systems within the wider empire was haphazard. In some colonies Special Branch units had still not been formally established independent of CID by the 1960's.<sup>57</sup> Overall the concept of political policing as a means to provide surveillance of public organisations and political leaders only gained a higher priority when colonial governments attempted to maintain a semblance of control in the countdown to a transfer of power.

The slow overall pace of reform of police intelligence systems as a reactive process was keenly noted by Templer in 1955, by then Chief of the Imperial General Staff. In his report on colonial security to the British cabinet he argued that 'had our intelligence system been better, we might have been spared the emergency in Kenya and perhaps that in Malaya. It must be our objective to improve the present system that we are, so far as is humanly possible, insured against similar catastrophes in future ...' This could only be achieved by an efficient police force and, in parallel, their special branch. It seemed that the 'vital importance of the police is realised quickly enough once an emergency has started; but in time of 'peace' it tends to be a Cinderella, neglected in favour of such more attractive and popular sisters as Health and Welfare, or the revenue-earning Departments.'<sup>58</sup> This once again reflected the dichotomy of policing the end of empire: a view within Whitehall that any imperial crisis should be contained and yet there being a failure to make adequate provisions for effective policing until it was almost too late. Part of the problem stemmed from post-war financial considerations. As late as the summer of 1955, attempts were still being made to obtain sufficient British funds in order to supplement colonial governments' expenditure on police and intelligence.<sup>59</sup> A chance remark from a treasury official earlier on that year summed up the Colonial Office view: 'I don't know whether in the end we shall be able to hold this line; expenditure on police is not popular with 'responsible' [sic] Colonial Legislatures'.<sup>60</sup> This view countered Templer's argument that there was still an urgent need to 'step up' intelligence activity requiring a considerable investment in the training of police special branch officers. He noted that even since 1950, MI5 had offered training to only 290 overseas officers, 'a drop in the ocean of what needs to be done; only one or two of the above for example were from West Africa, Central Africa and the Caribbean, the great majority being from the Far East ... [our] training commitments [are] now so large that it is no longer possible to meet requests from the colonies on an ad hoc basis'. He stressed that these reforms would not be achieved without substantial expenditure – an estimated £250,000 to establish the system followed by £75,000 a year. This was felt to be worthwhile compared to the annual cost of £7-8 million of military operations alone in Malaya.<sup>61</sup> Templer's report highlighted weaknesses that lay at the heart of

Colonial Office attitudes towards the problems of security and intelligence that had led to reform being undertaken too late in the day. Generally speaking there was a failure amongst officials to see the whole intelligence picture and to label 'intelligence on the security situation in the Colonies as a matter purely for the Colonial Secretary'. This in the longer term could jeopardise the workings of the joint intelligence committees and possibly British defence as a whole.<sup>62</sup>

Yet from a different perspective, the manner in which police intelligence was *used* demonstrated that the British, in theory, were attempting to prevent some of the mistakes that had been made in Ireland in 1916-1922, and, latterly in Palestine during the end stages of the Mandate (1946-48). Certainly each territory brought its own set of security and political problems which necessitated different policing priorities from an operational perspective. What changed at this time was the realisation that Special Branch should be the principal police agency for the gathering and collation of security and political intelligence. Criminal intelligence would remain the preserve of CID. In Malaya, the implementation of a rigid structure allowed the flow of intelligence to be shared and co-ordinated at all levels. A system of intelligence committees was established at Federal, State and District levels to enable intelligence from civilian, military and police sources to be pooled and allow for satisfactory collaboration between the different agencies. The changes to the structure of civil-police-military relations would be further tested in Kenya during the Mau Mau emergency and later transplanted to other parts of the empire.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Philip Murphy for his insightful comments on reading earlier drafts of this essay and for the helpful comments and guidance offered by an anonymous reviewer.

<sup>2</sup> See Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence; Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> The National Archives, London [henceforth TNA] KV 4/408, J. P. Morton, 'The Co-ordination of Intelligence in the Malayan Emergency', The Malayan Emergency Lecture Material, Sept. 1951-1952, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Scholarly interest in colonial policing was reinvigorated with the publication of two essay volumes: David Anderson & David Killingray (eds.), *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991) & Anderson & Killingray, *Policing and Decolonisation; Nationalism, Politics and the Police, 1917-65*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992). Subsequent research has fed into police studies more generally; policing itself being a key object of study in the literature on (colonial) conflict and social movements.

<sup>5</sup> This essay was originally submitted in 2008.

<sup>6</sup> I will not enter into the complex debates on COIN and the extent to which the British could be described as effective or otherwise during the Malayan Emergency.

<sup>7</sup> See for example: Richard Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War against Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Richard Aldrich, Gary Rawnsley & Min-Yen Rawnsley (eds.) *The Clandestine Cold War in Asia 1945-65: Western Intelligence, Propaganda, and Special Operations* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); Phillip Deery, 'Malaya, 1948: Britain's Asian Cold War', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 9/1, (2007) pp. 29-54 & Calder Walton, 'British Intelligence and Threats to National Security, circa 1941-1951. Ph.D. (University of Cambridge, 2006). Also see: Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Allen Lane, 2009) & Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909-1949* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010). With regard to military intelligence see: Riley Sunderland, *Antiguerrilla Intelligence in Malaya, 1948-1960* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1964).

<sup>8</sup> See for example: Christopher Bayly & Tim Harper, *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain's Asian Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); Karl Hack, 'The Malayan Emergency as Counter-Insurgency Paradigm', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32/3, (2009), pp. 383-414 & Huw Bennett, "'A very salutary effect': The Counter-Terror Strategy in the Early Malayan Emergency, June 1948-December 1949", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32/2, (2009), pp. 415-444.

<sup>9</sup> Simon C Smith, 'General Templer and Counter-Insurgency in Malaya: Hearts and Minds, Intelligence, and Propaganda', *INS*, 16/3 (2001) pp.60-78; John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Karl Hack, 'British Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in the Era of Decolonisation: the Example of Malaya', *Intelligence and National Security*, 14/2 (1999) pp. 124-155; Martin Thomas, 'Insurgent intelligence: information gathering and anti-colonial rebellion', *Intelligence and National Security*, 22/11 (2007) pp. 155-163.

<sup>11</sup> In relation to Malaya see: A. J. Stockwell, 'Policing during the Malayan Emergency, 1948-60: communism, communalism and decolonisation' in Anderson, David & Killingray, David (eds.), *Policing and Decolonisation; Nationalism, Politics and the Police, 1917-65*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) pp. 105-127; Georgina Sinclair, *At the End of the Line; Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006) pp. 165-173.

<sup>12</sup> See: Leon Comber, 'The Malayan Security Service (MSS) 1945-1948', *Intelligence and National Security*, 18/3 (2003) pp.128-153; Comber, 'The Malayan Special Branch on the Malayan-Thai Frontier during the Malayan Emergency (1948-60)', *Intelligence and National Security* 21/1 (2006) pp. 77-99; Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police 1945-60, The role of the Special Branch in the Malayan Emergency* (Monash: Monash Asia Institute, 2008). Comber's *Malaya's Secret Police 1945-60; The Role of the Special Branch in the Malayan Emergency* argues that successful intelligence gathering was a crucial feature of British colonial rule and also of the independent Malaysian government following independence in 1957. As a study of the intelligence branch of the Malayan Police Special Branch it remains one of the few works of intelligence and political surveillance within the Asian context.

<sup>13</sup> The extent of a co-ordinated global Communist offensive was the subject of considerable official discussion and debate as discussed in the Asian context: Karl Hack, 'The origins of the Asian Cold War: Malaya 1948', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 40/3 (2010), pp. 471 - 496.

<sup>14</sup> TNA CO 537 2793, Creech Jones circular despatch to all colonial governors, Review of Police and Security Forces in relation to Communist infiltration, 1948.

<sup>15</sup> TNA CO 537/5440, William Johnson, 'Report on the Colonial Police Service' to the Colonial Office, 28 December 1949. Johnson was appointed on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1948 as IGCPs, having been seconded from the Home Office. At that time there were no less than 43 police forces operating within separate territories and with a total regular establishment of 1, 1160 officers and 56,912 other ranks. The forces all varied in size from the Falkland Islands with a total of 8 all ranks to the Federation of Malaya with a total of 15,854 excluding auxiliaries.

<sup>16</sup> TNA CO 537/2781, Creech Jones, Secret Circular despatch to Colonial Governors, 20 Aug. 1948.

<sup>17</sup> TNA CO 717/171/3, First combined intelligence staff summary (No 1), week ending 15 July 1948, Secret No 69, Law and Order. Military Situation, CID reports (1948).

<sup>18</sup> TNA MEPO 2/9710, Report of the Police Mission to Malaya, 1950.

<sup>19</sup> TNA KV 4/408. Approximately 650 UK police were seconded during the Malayan Emergency as police lieutenants. Morton, 'Co-ordination of police', p. 7, & TNA MEPO 2/9710, Report of the Police Mission to Malaya, 1950.

<sup>20</sup> TNA KV 4/408, Morton, 'Co-ordination of intelligence', p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police*, p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> TNA CO 537/7260, Report on history of 'Police Intelligence in Malaya', 25 September, 1951, 'Police Dept. Special Branch CID specialist August – Sept. 1951.

<sup>23</sup> Despite repeated claims of the MSS's failures to warn the authorities of the Communist Party's activities, it was in 1948 under strength by 50% with only 13 UK gazetted officers, 44 Asian Inspectors and 2 Archivists. See Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>24</sup> The Malayan Police was federal with a decentralised chain of command within the states and settlements. Both the Singapore and Malayan Police had their own CID unit which housed Special Branch. In Singapore, Special Branch had been in existence since as early as 1916. For further details see Ban Kah Choon, *Absent History: The Untold Story of the Special Branch Operations in Singapore 1915-1942* (Singapore: Horizon Books, 2001). The relationship between CID Malaya and Singapore rested on the notion that geographically the area was co-ordinated as one by the British for defense purposes, although politically operating within two separate frameworks. See Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in South-east Asia: Malaya and Singapore, 1941-67* (Routledge, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> TNA CO 537/2647, Sillitoe to Lloyd, (CO), Personal and confidential letter, 17 Dec. 1947.

<sup>26</sup> TNA CO 537/2647, Sillitoe to Lloyd, (CO), Personal and confidential letter, 17 Dec. 1947.

<sup>27</sup> Dalley was responsible to the government of Malaya and Singapore but not to the Commissioner of the Malayan Police.

<sup>28</sup> TNA CO 537/2647, Sillitoe to Lloyd, (CO), Personal and confidential letter, 17 Dec. 1947.

<sup>29</sup> TNA CO 537/2647, The Colonial Office did not hold the same view. In a handwritten note in the margin of this correspondence, Lloyd noted that 'Dally is good at his job and well in with his sources. He has deep knowledge of development etc...' Note, n.d.

<sup>30</sup> NA CO 537/2647, Sir Ralph Hone, Malayan Government to Seel, CO, top secret letter, 26 July 1948.

<sup>31</sup> TNA CO 537/2647, Seel to Hone, top secret letter, 9 Aug. 1948.

<sup>32</sup> Taken from an interview with R. W. (Dick) Craig (Palestine Police, Malayan Police Special Branch, Senior Assist. Com., dec., 1946-64), Jan. 2000 & Craig, *Malayan Emergency*, Unpublished account of the Malayan Emergency, Family Papers, pp. 6-9.

<sup>33</sup> TNA KV 4/408, Morton, 'Co-ordination of intelligence', p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> TNA DEFE 11/33/2, Gurney to Creech Jones, 39 May 1949.

<sup>35</sup> TNA CO 537/4374, Slim, 'Notes on Tour of South-East Asia, October, 1949'.

<sup>36</sup> TNA CO DEFE 11/33/169, Report on the Malayan Police Force, July 1949,. Some officers transferred from the Hong Kong Police at a later stage but overall of a total establishment of 19, 964 officers in 1958 only 1,927 were Chinese. Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police*, p. 114. TNA CO DEFE 11/33/169, Report on the Malayan Police Force, July 1949. Besides police reform at this time was faced with practical financial considerations with post-war colonial governments feeling the draft when it came to finances.

<sup>37</sup> TNA MEPO 2/9710, There is a CID Branch at the headquarters of each contingent and in some places there is also a branch at circle level. (The area covered by each Contingent is divided into several 'circles' and each circle is usually divided into three or four districts.) Report of the Police Mission to Malaya, 1950.

<sup>38</sup> TNA MEPO 2/9710, Report of the Police Mission to Malaya, 1950.

<sup>39</sup> TNA CO 537 4404, Creech Jones, circular despatch, n.d. , Review of Police and Security, Focus in relation to communist activities: Special Constables, 1949.

<sup>40</sup> TNA CO 537/7260, Police Dept. Special Branch – CID Specialist, Aug. – Sept. 1951.

<sup>41</sup> TNA CO 537/7260, Note of a meeting, 1 Sept. 1951, Police Dept. Special Branch – CID Specialist, Aug. – Sept. 1951.

<sup>42</sup> TNA CO 537/7260, Signed Higham, minutes, 11-9-1951.

<sup>43</sup> TNA CO 537/7260, 'Police Intelligence Malaya', report, 25 Sept. 1951, Police Dept. Special Branch CID specialist August – Sept. 1951. Jenkin's legacy though was to leave detailed guidelines on how Special Branch headquarters should be organised at federal level and how it should operate on a day by day basis. (Directive No. 9). See Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police*, pp. 139.

<sup>44</sup> See Harry Miller, *Jungle War in Malaya* (London: Arthur Barker, 1972) & Brian Stewart, 'Wining in Malaya: An Intelligence Success Story', *Intelligence and National Security*, 14/4 (1999) pp. 267-283. This is substantiated by Morton in his lectures on intelligence, TNA KV4/408.

<sup>45</sup> Their task would be to collate information produced by Special Branch for army use, to man the army/police operations rooms, organise counter-intelligence operations but would not be in the gathering of intelligence.

<sup>46</sup> The DOI was made a full member of the Director of Operations Committee, chairman of the Federal Intelligence Committee and Security Sub-Committee and was given the job of advising and co-ordinating all branches of intelligence.

<sup>47</sup> TNA KV 4/408, Morton, 'Malaya lectures', Sept. 1951.

<sup>48</sup> Craig, Jan. 00.

<sup>49</sup> TNA CO 537/4239, Gurney to Creech Jones, telegram, 12 July 1948, Law and Order Malaya – Special Forces, 1948.

<sup>50</sup> TNA CO 537/4239 A, Creech Jones to Walter Fletcher, MP, personal and confidential letter, 27 July 1948.

<sup>51</sup> *Daily Mail Reporter*, 5 August 1948.

<sup>52</sup> TNA CO 537/4239 A, Fletcher to Rees – Williams, CO, Private, 13 July 1948.

<sup>53</sup> TNA CO 537/4239 A, Noted in an newspaper article, *Scotsman*, 5 November 1948.

<sup>54</sup> TNA MEPO 2/9710, Report of the Police Mission to Malaya, 1950.

<sup>55</sup> Craig, Jan. 00.

<sup>56</sup> TNA MEPO 2/9064, Malayan Police Unit – Transfers to Malaya from the Metropolitan Police, 1951.

<sup>57</sup> For example British Honduras. See Summary of comments and recommendations, British Honduras Police, 10 Nov. 1966, TNA CO 1037/257.

<sup>58</sup> TNA CAB 21/2925, 'General Templer's file, part 2 of 2', 1955.

<sup>59</sup> TNA T 220/1395, Note to minister of defence, signed NCD Brownjohn, 11 July 1955, Security in the colonies, TNA T 220/1395A E Drake, note on internal security, 17 January. 1955.

<sup>60</sup> TNA T 220/1395A, E Drake, note on internal security, 17 January. 1955.

<sup>61</sup> TNA CAB 21/2925, 'General Templer's file', part 2 of 2, 1955.

<sup>62</sup> TNA DEFE 13/309, Committee on Security in the Colonial, Action outstanding on General Templer's report on colonial security, GEN 485/24, n.d., Colonial Security, 1955-1960.