The British intelligence community in Singapore, 1946-1959:

Local security, regional coordination and the Cold War in the Far East

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Abstract

Singapore was the stronghold of British intelligence in the Far East during the Cold War. The small city-colony played host to a diverse range of British intelligence organisations including regional outposts of MI5 and the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), specialist technical intelligence centres, open source reporting centres and the police Special Branch. These intelligence outfits operated across three levels: the local, the regional and the national. This thesis investigates the British intelligence milieu in Singapore, focusing upon its organisation and status; its working culture and operations; and its impact or influence. In so doing, the thesis interrogates to what extent we can speak of a definable British intelligence 'community' in Singapore during the early Cold War. It concludes that there were instead two distinct communities: a local intelligence community, and a regional-national one. Nevertheless, there were two core similarities. Security intelligence was at the forefront of both communities as the most appropriate response to the nature of the Cold War both within Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. Secondly, both intelligence communities played a significant role not just in shaping official perceptions but as avenues for covert policy implementation. At the regional level, intelligence activities enabled Britain to fight the Cold War through clandestine measures, fulfilling the key policy goal of providing containment without (extensive) commitments. Locally, security intelligence was a major driving force in the engagement between the Singapore government, communist 'terrorists' and anti-colonial nationalists. This thesis is not just about British intelligence in the Cold War. It also provides original insight into Singapore's transition to self-government between 1946 and 1959 by focusing on the crucial role played by Special Branch. Intelligence services were vital in ensuring that Singapore was rendered 'safe' for decolonisation, and their activities indicate continuity between colonial and post-colonial government in Singapore.

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Note on terminology

In this thesis, the dollar symbol ($) is used to refer to the Malayan Dollar (1939-53) and its successor, the Malaya and British Borneo Dollar (1953-67). For consistency, 'Southeast Asia' is used instead of 'South East Asia' or 'South-East Asia' except in direct quotations where the original form is preserved.

<u>List of abbreviations</u>

British intelligence

C	Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS)
DMI	Director of Military Intelligence, War Office
DSO	Defence Security Officer, MI5
FECB	Far Eastern Combined Bureau
GCHQ	Government Communications Headquarters
GSI	General Staff Intelligence, Singapore
GSO(I)	General Staff Officer (Intelligence)
H/SIFE	Head of Security Intelligence Far East
IRD	Information Research Department, Foreign Office
ISD	Intelligence and Security Department, Colonial Office
JAPIB(FE)	Joint Air Photographic Intelligence Board, Far East
JAPIC(FE)	Joint Air Photographic Intelligence Centre, Far East
JARIC(FE)	Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre, Far East
JIB	Joint Intelligence Bureau
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
JIC(FE)	Joint Intelligence Committee, Far East
JID	Joint Intelligence Division, SIFE and MI6
JIS(FE)	Joint Intelligence Staff, Far East
LIC	Local Intelligence Committee (various)
MI2	Directorate of Military Intelligence, Middle and Far East section
MI5	Security Service

MSS	Malayan Security Service
RIO	Regional Information Office, Foreign Office
SIC	Singapore Intelligence Committee
SIFE	Security Intelligence Far East
SILC	Services Intelligence Liaison Committee, Singapore
SIME	Security Intelligence Middle East
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service (or MI6)
SIS(FE)	Secret Intelligence Service (Far East) or the Far East Controllerate
SLO	Security Liaison Officer, MI5

Non-British intelligence

ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (Australia)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (United States)
JIB(M)	Joint Intelligence Bureau, Melbourne (Australia)
BIS	Bureau of Investigation and Statistics (Republic of China)
NEFIS	Netherlands East Indies Forces Intelligence Service (Dutch Indonesia)
SDECE	Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage (France)

Other

ABL	Singapore People's Anti-British League
BDCC(FE)	British Defence Coordination Committee, Far East
CCP	Chinese Communist Party

CID   Criminal Investigation Department

FARELF   Far East Land Forces, British Army

FEAF   Far East Air Force, RAF

FES   Far East Station, Royal Navy

FORD   Foreign Office Research Department

GLU   General Labour Union, Singapore

MCP   Malayan Communist Party

PMFTU   Pan Malayan Federation of Trade Unions

PAP   People's Action Party

PRC   People's Republic of China

RAF   Royal Air Force

SCMSSU   Singapore Chinese Middle School Students Union

SEATO   South-East Asian Treaty Organisation

SF&SWU   Singapore Factory and Shop Workers Union

SFTU   Singapore Federation of Trade Unions

SHLU   Singapore Harbour Labour Union

References

MAC   Malcolm MacDonald Papers

NAA   National Archives of Australia

NARA   National Archives and Records Administration (United States)

NAS   National Archives of Singapore

TNA   The National Archives (UK)

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1. Introduction. A 'unique window'?

As centres of real-life intrigue and fictional espionage drama, Berlin and Vienna attained iconic status as Cold War spy cities. To a lesser extent, Hong Kong enjoyed a reputation as 'the Berlin of the East'.[1] Far less attention has been given to Singapore, despite the city-colony being, as noted Richard Aldrich, 'the nerve centre of British defence forces east of Suez'.[2] Although Hong Kong was a significant base for 'China watching', Singapore was the hub of British intelligence in the Far East.[3]

This thesis examines the organisation, operation and influence of the British intelligence apparatus in Singapore during the early Cold War. It emphasises the creation of two distinct British intelligence communities in Singapore: a local community focused on internal developments within the city-colony, and a regional community with an external outlook often (but not always) aligned with Britain's national intelligence agenda. Contemporary commentators expressed two contradictory views of this system. On the one hand, some of the user departments receiving their reports saw the 'regional' level of intelligence as a waste of effort and expense. It is true that intelligence managers in Singapore struggled to secure a reliable intake of raw information from their outposts in Southeast Asia, and that their analyses sometimes admitted to being largely speculative. However, another viewpoint predominated: that this system provided a 'unique window' and unique opportunity to deal with the intelligence challenges posed by Singapore and Southeast Asia. These challenges included violence orchestrated by national communist parties such as the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), Viet Minh and others; concerns about the influence of communist China over Chinese diasporas; anxieties about the anti-colonial activities of Indonesia; and fears about the possibility of direct Soviet meddling. Meanwhile, Britain was reluctant to enter into overt and encompassing Cold War commitments in Southeast Asia. As this thesis demonstrates, the Singapore intelligence apparatus

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[1] Mark Chi-kwan, *Hong Kong and the Cold War: Anglo-American Relations, 1949-1957* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 43; Johannes Richard Lombardo, 'United States Foreign Policy towards the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong during the Early Cold War Period, 1945-1964' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Hong Kong, 1997) p. 51.
[2] Richard J. Aldrich, '"The Value of Residual Empire": Anglo-American Intelligence Cooperation in Asia after 1945', in *Intelligence, Defence and Diplomacy: British Policy in the Post-War World*, ed. by Richard J. Aldrich and Michael F. Hopkins (Ilford: Frank Cass, 1994), pp. 226-258 (p. 236).
[3] Aldrich, 'The Value of Residual Empire', p. 248.

provided an ideal solution. It became a framework to covertly fight the Cold War in Southeast Asia through propaganda, security assistance and intelligence diplomacy. This is why the Singapore intelligence machine continued to be regarded as an important tool in Britain's Cold War arsenal.

Meanwhile, the thesis also provides an original contribution to our understanding of Singapore's transition towards eventual independence during the critical period of 1946-59. Intelligence and security services were at the forefront of this process, and understanding their role casts light on the priorities, vulnerabilities and strengths of the colonial state during its latter stages. The importance of intelligence and the security operations it guided emphasises continuity between colonial and post-colonial Singapore.

The significance of Singapore to Britain's Cold War was encapsulated by the commentary of Joseph Burkholder Smith, an American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) official posted to Singapore in 1954:

> Singapore, however, presented a set of special circumstances […] It was the site of the headquarters of all British defence forces east of Suez – army, navy and air – as well as the location of the office of the High Commissioner for Southeast Asia,[4] to which were attached an office of MI-5,[5] Britain's intelligence service charged with the 'security of the realm', MI-6,[6] the British secret service for foreign intelligence operations, an office for collating intelligence from all British and Commonwealth intelligence-collection organisations in the Far East,[7] and the Information Research Department, IRD,[8] Britain's Cold War propaganda and psychological warfare service. The CIA Singapore station, hence, was located in the centre of British intelligence and Cold War activities involving all of Asia.[9]

This list is incomplete. Singapore also played host to the regional headquarters of Britain's Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), the three service intelligence directorates (army, navy and air force), a significant signals intelligence site, a specialised image intelligence centre, and various open source intelligence initiatives. These agencies all had an outwards-facing 'regional' outlook. They

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[4] The Commissioner General for Southeast Asia.
[5] MI5, whose motto is actually *Regnum Defende*: defence of the realm.
[6] MI6, more properly known as the Secret Intelligence Service.
[7] The Joint Intelligence Bureau.
[8] Represented in Singapore through its offshoot, the Regional Information Office.
[9] Joseph B. Smith, *Portrait of a Cold Warrior* (New York: Putnam's, 1976), pp. 145-146.

were joined by more inwards-looking, 'local' intelligence services such as the police Special Branch.

In addition, as Smith's statement implied, the importance of Singapore to Britain's imperial outlook made it a centre for international intelligence interactions. Cold War allies including the United States, Australia, France and the Netherlands all maintained a presence in Singapore to participate in the often unrewarding game of intelligence liaison. Less friendly nations also contributed to the Singapore intelligence game. British security services were concerned about the potential activities of Soviet and Chinese spies, although there was little evidence of their presence. In the early 1950s, Indonesia's intelligence services were useful allies. However, by the time of Indonesia's Outer Islands rebellion in 1958, supported covertly by Britain and the United States, relations had deteriorated. Indonesian rebels used Singapore to gather information on the outside world and try to garner sympathy, whilst the security services of the Indonesian state recruited local agents to frustrate their efforts.[10] With such a plethora of friendly and hostile clandestine operatives, it is no surprise that Wies Platje, a former Dutch cryptanalyst, recalled that 'Singapore became an ideal fishing ground for a professional intelligence officer'.[11]

The rise of Singapore as a Cold War intelligence city created enticing opportunities for Britain. Not only was it the hub of their own intelligence efforts, but Singapore's status helped bolster their dwindling power and influence through interactions with long-standing allies and new post-colonial nations. This process could also be a cause for friction and jealousy between the authorities in Singapore and the imperial metropole.

In January 1955, Sir Dick White, the Director-General of Britain's Security Service, faced an uphill struggle in convincing the Foreign Office of the importance of Singapore intelligence work. The Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, was considering cost-saving by reducing overseas intelligence establishments. Comparing Singapore with Germany, the Permanent Under-

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[10] Matthew Jones, 'Maximum Disavowable Aid: Britain, the United States and the Indonesian Rebellion, 1957-1958', *English Historical Review*, 114(459) (1999), 1179-1216 (p. 1188).
[11] Wies Platje, 'Dutch Sigint and the Conflict with Indonesia', in *Secrets of Signals Intelligence during the Cold War and Beyond* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), pp. 285-312 (p. 301).

Secretary seemed to think that 'Singapore also was full of intelligence officers […] a slough of despond in South East Asia'. Kirkpatrick disregarded the value of intelligence collation and analysis on the spot. He criticised the Far Eastern intelligence hub in Singapore and its Middle Eastern counterpart in Cyprus. As White recalled, Kirkpatrick questioned whether 'by working on the island of Cyprus, one was any more realistically partaking in the atmosphere of the Middle East than by working in London. Indeed, he thought that the tendency of a small island would be towards parochialism'.[12]

In contrast, Cold War intelligence managers preferred the argument that an intelligence community in Singapore could provide more informed analyses of developments based on proximity and cultural immersion than any analysis that could be produced in London. This view was not unique to British intelligence. During his first visit to Singapore, the CIA's Russell Jack Smith, observed that:

> The professional bonanza came in the realisation of Singapore's significance in the mid-1950s as a strategic centre in Southeast Asia. Singapore was far more than an entrepôt. For the British it was both a bastion of commercial-financial interest and a regional defence centre […] For the Americans, Singapore had mostly commercial value, but its importance in long-term strategic terms was evident in Washington. For both, it was a unique window on the swirling post-World War II scene of Southeast Asia where every country from Burma to Indonesia was struggling to reach a new accommodation with changed realities. It seemed to me that an observer with a broad substantive background, situated in Singapore, could provide perspectives and insights of value. Through his immersion in the local scene and his normal contacts with merchants, shipping men, military officers, and diplomats he could gain an understanding of the interplay of economic, political, and strategic forces as seen from *within* the region, not from distant and paperbound Washington.[13]

This thesis explores the tension between these two interpretations: the 'slough of despond' and 'unique window'. Looking purely at the production of intelligence and its processing from raw information into useful reports, it is easy to see why

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[12] Kew, The National Archives [TNA], KV 4/426, Note of discussion between White and Kirkpatrick, 13 January 1955.

[13] Russell Jack Smith, *The Unknown CIA: My Three Decades with the Agency* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1989), p. 90.

Singapore could be regarded as a 'slough of despond'. Yet this view failed to gather traction. Instead, the 'unique window' view came to dominate.

This 'unique window' (or 'slough of despond') was part of an even larger organisation: the office of the Commissioner General for Southeast Asia. This was a semi-proconsular appointment created in May 1948 to coordinate foreign, colonial, defence and intelligence policy in Southeast Asia. During the period covered by this thesis, the office had two incumbents. Its first holder (from 1948-55) was Malcolm MacDonald. An unconventional diplomat and avid collector of Asian art, MacDonald once proclaimed that 'I like Beauty, I love Beauty, I worship Beauty in all its earthly forms'.[14] His relationship with the intelligence community, however, was not always so amorous. At first a thorn in the side of the intelligence services, by the 1950s MacDonald became an enthusiastic champion of secret intelligence and covert propaganda. A believer in 'domino theory', he appreciated the utility of clandestine methods in achieving Britain's Cold War goals on the sly.[15] In 1955, MacDonald was replaced by the more conventional Robert Heatlie Scott. The latter already had an intimate knowledge of the intelligence apparatus in the Far East. In the course of his Foreign Office career, Scott had served as the first chair of the JIC in Singapore.

In 1952, *The Times* explained to its readers the activities of this regional bureaucracy, by then housed in a purpose-built complex at Phoenix Park. This former golf club was converted to house the 450 civil servants working under Malcolm MacDonald in Singapore. Its name was derived from the emblem of wartime Southeast Asia Command. *The Times* wrote that:

> The office of the Commissioner General in Southeast Asia has been described as a tropical duplication of Whitehall, and it certainly represents an intelligent approach to the new Asia. In its prefabricated offices in

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[14] Malcolm J. MacDonald, *The Pleasures and Pains of Collecting*, ed. by Alexander Nicholas Shaw (Durham: Friends of the Oriental Museum, 2018), p. 154.

[15] 'Domino theory' refers to the idea that the 'fall' of one nation to communism could cause communism to spread to neighbouring states ad infinitum – like falling dominoes. The term was popularised by President Eisenhower in 1954 with regard to Indochina. Wen-Qing Ngoei suggested that MacDonald's views, transmitted to the Americans and borne out by the rapid collapse of Southeast Asia to Japan in 1941-42, may have influenced Eisenhower's developing views. See: Wen-Qing Ngoei, 'World War II, Race and the Southeast Asian Origins of the Domino Theory', *Sources and Methods* (Wilson Centre, 2017) <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/world-war-ii-race-and-the-southeast-asian-origins-the-domino-theory> [accessed 8 March 2019].

Phoenix Park are diplomatic and colonial sections, economic, technical and labour, and intelligence departments and the Defence Coordination Committee, and if at times the complexity of its scope would seem confusing it is no more so than the region with which it is concerned. One of its main tasks is the collection and coordination of information of all kinds from British territories and neighbouring countries.[16]

Information was at the heart of this large and nebulously-defined bureaucracy. This thesis considers how intelligence agencies not only helped to shape the opinions of user departments in Phoenix Park (and Singapore's Government House), but also how they provided opportunities to enact policies. This is particularly evident in the role of Special Branch as a police enforcement actor as well as intelligence collector. It is equally clear with regard to the international intelligence activities which supported Britain's foreign policy objectives. The ability to contribute to policy implementation was a major factor in explaining why the effectiveness and desirability of the Singapore intelligence centre was not subjected to greater scrutiny.

Within Singapore, there were many British intelligence agencies. At the apex of the status pyramid sat the Joint Intelligence Committee, Far East – the JIC(FE). This was a body primarily concerned with multiple-source evaluations with a strategic focus. It was modelled upon the national JIC which sat under the Chiefs of Staff Committee in Whitehall and acted as 'the interface between intelligence and policy'.[17] Underneath the JIC(FE), a number of independent agencies conducted different intelligence activities. Two of the most prominent were Security Intelligence Far East (SIFE) and the Far East Controller. SIFE was an offshoot of the Security Service (MI5) concerned with security intelligence. The Far East Controller, also known as SIS(FE), was the regional representative of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6). The Controller coordinated SIS field stations across the region. A Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB) prepared reports for the armed services about defence economics, topography and scientific matters. There were also intelligence departments affiliated with the three armed services, as well as other joint initiatives. These intelligence organisations sat across three bureaucratic levels. The JIC(FE), SIFE and SIS(FE) all sat at the

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[16] 'Troubles of S.-East Asian Region', *The Times*, 5 December 1952, p. 6.
[17] Percy Cradock, *Know Your Enemy: How the Joint Intelligence Committee Saw the World* (London: John Murray, 2002), p. 1.

'regional' level, using Singapore as a base (and conceptual focal point) for activities across Southeast Asia. This was closely tied with the 'national' priorities of British intelligence, and 'national' bodies like MI5 Head Office sometimes interfered with processes occurring in Singapore. Meanwhile, the 'local' level of intelligence, concerned with Singapore itself, was dominated by the police Special Branch. Defining the boundaries between national security intelligence (a concept examined later in this chapter), colonial information production and police-work persistently created problems across these levels of intelligence.

There are three core concepts to this thesis. Firstly, it examines the organisation, working culture and impact of the three levels of British intelligence working in or through Singapore. From this, it concludes that there were strong distinctions between the local intelligence community and a 'regional-national' one. Secondly, two interpretations of this system are evaluated: the 'unique window' versus the 'slough of despond'. Britain struggled to improve information collection, implying that – in terms of fulfilling its most basic intelligence functions – regional intelligence was a 'slough of despond'. Nevertheless, this view did not persist, and regional intelligence was seen as effective for a number of reasons. Most notably, it provided an opportunity to exert influence in the clandestine Cold War and preserve British influence. Thirdly, this thesis highlights the significance of intelligence to understanding Singapore's post-war transitions from colony to self-government.

Singapore in transition

Whilst this discussion is concerned primarily with the role of a particular British intelligence community in the Cold War, it also provides a new perspective on the history of Singapore. The period of 1946-59 was one of great change within Singapore. It was also a period of political diversity, when the triumph of the People's Action Party (PAP), which has governed the city-state continuously from the first elections under self-government in 1959, was not yet certain. During the 1940s and 1950s, colonial administrators had to deal with the sometimes violent opposition of the MCP, various hues of what they regarded as more 'legitimate' nationalists, and growing concerns about the pull factor of

communist China. They were equally concerned about the potential for Soviet or Indonesian meddling, and the uncertainties generated by the national government's move towards decolonisation. In this period of Singapore's transition, intelligence was at the forefront of Britain's response. Its vital role has not previously been explored.

In April 1946, the temporary British Military Administration handed over authority to a new civilian government. Before the Second World War, Singapore was administered as part of the 'Straits Settlements' consisting of Malacca, Penang and Singapore. The other Malay States were under indirect rule. After the war, this form of colonial government seemed anachronistic, and British rule was modernised to better facilitate progress towards self-government. Singapore became a separate Crown Colony and mainland Malaya was unified into a Malayan Union (1946-48) and subsequently the Federation of Malaya (1948-57). The first Governor of Singapore (see table 1.1) was Franklin Gimson. An experienced Colonial Office Asia hand, Gimson's career had taken him from Ceylon to Hong Kong just in time to be interned by the invading Japanese. After four months as Governor of Singapore, Gimson was awarded a knighthood. Some of his early priorities were social welfare provision and minor political reforms. However, the increasing violence of the 'Emergency' provoked by the MCP and the government's incompetence during a period of riots in December 1950 dominated Gimson's governorship.[18]

Table 1.1. Governors of Singapore, 1946-59

Franklin Gimson	1946-52
John Fearns Nicoll	1952-55
Robert Brown Black	1955-57
William A. C. Goode	1957-59

Singapore's status as a 'new' colony had a bearing upon intelligence activities, which at times seemed experimental. Equally importantly, its ethnic make-up was a crucial factor in how intelligence practitioners and their

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[18] A. J. Stockwell, 'A Colonial Progress: Franklin Gimson in Ceylon, Hong Kong and Singapore', in *Studying Singapore's Past: C. M. Turnbull and the History of Modern Singapore*, ed. by Nicholas Tarling (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), pp. 171-206.

governmental consumers understood Singapore. In 1947, Singapore underwent its first post-war census. Before results were published, the government estimated that 90% of the population were ethnically Chinese. The actual results showed that, of a total population of 980,000, 77.7% were Chinese (see table 1.2).[19] By the time of the next census in 1957, the population had grown by almost 50% to over 1.4 million. This rapid growth entailed an additional concern for intelligence practitioners, particularly with regard to immigration from China or Hong Kong.[20]

Table 1.2. Singapore population in 1947.

Chinese	77.7%
Malay	12.2%
Indian	7.2%
European	1.1%
Eurasian	1.0%
Other ethnic background	0.8%

The most pressing problem facing Singapore was the Malayan Emergency. Beginning in June 1948, communist-inspired violence in the Federation of Malaya led to a government crackdown and a prolonged insurgency aimed at overthrowing colonial rule. As well as fighting a jungle war in the Federation, the MCP also conducted underground activities in Singapore. Sometimes their campaign entailed more open, violent activities characterised by the colonial government as terrorism. The Gimson government followed the direction of Malcolm MacDonald and the Federation in declaring a State of Emergency.

Membership of the MCP was strongest amongst the Chinese population. This alludes to a key point of distinction between the Emergencies in the Federation and Singapore. In the Federation, the Chinese were a minority and more easily subjected to population control methods. Conversely, they represented the overwhelming majority in Singapore. Security operations assumed a very different, more clandestine and less preventative, character.

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[19] TNA, FCO 141/14359, Minute by E. C. S. Adkins, 11 June 1947; TNA, CO 537/7247, The Leach Report, 17 May 1951, p. 2.
[20] Warwick Neville, 'Singapore: Ethnic Diversity and its Implications', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 56(2) (1966), 236-253 (pp. 237-238).

Colonial officials tried to understand their subject population with reference to ideas about race and loyalty. The Singapore government differentiated between the 'King's Chinese', who had being settled in Singapore for generations and, although supportive of self-government, would remain loyal to the British Commonwealth, and 'China born' Chinese who were more likely to be influenced by political developments within China.[21] Age was another demographic issue with security implications. In 1958, almost half of Singapore's population was characterised as being 'youths'.[22] Specifically, 43% of the population were under the age of fifteen.[23] This was perceived to be a particular problem because this generation grew up in the shadow of communist victory in the Chinese Civil War. From an imperialist perspective, these youths saw communism not as something which failed to impact upon Malayan politics in the 1930s, but which was successfully elevating China from a degraded state to a great power.[24] Communism was particularly strong in schools, and dealing with young people created problems for the police in a period of increasing public scrutiny. Heavy-handed policing became increasingly untenable.[25]

Moreover, the police force was dependent for recruitment upon the populations it was policing. In 1949, 88% of gazetted officers were Europeans. Although this was an overwhelming majority, it was smaller than in most colonies. In Hong Kong, there was not a single non-European police officer. There were only three colonies in the whole British Empire (Mauritius, Cyprus and Jamaica) which had a greater number of non-European officers.[26] The intelligence arm of the police, the Special Branch, offered greater opportunities for non-Europeans and appointed its first locally-born Director in 1957.

However, for the police rank-and-file, the colonial government relied upon locally-recruited staff. The majority of the police were Malay. In 1952, less than 9% of the total police force was Chinese.[27] In 1956, when the 'Malayanisation' of

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[21] FCO 141/14359, Minute by E. C. S. Adkins, 11 June 1947.
[22] FCO 141/14766, Colonial Office memorandum, 'Singapore – Political Situation and Outlook', 10 February 1958.
[23] Michael D. Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019), p. 104.
[24] Gerald P. Dartford, 'The Communist Threat to Malaya and Singapore', *Current History*, 38(222) (1960), 82-87 (p. 86).
[25] [National Archives of Singapore], NAS 001745, Interview with Nigel Morris, reel 6.
[26] FCO 141/14424, Report of the Police Adviser, December 1949.
[27] TNA, CO 1022/167, Extract from Malayan Bulletin no. 65, 25 May 1952.

the police was a hot political topic, 75% of the total police force remained Malay. Their officers, however, mostly comprised of Chinese or Indians at the lower ranks and Europeans in top positions. This garnered the attention of the JIC in London which saw the ethnic make-up of the police as problematic. Foremost, it appeared to favour the Malays overall, running the risk of the majority Chinese population seeing the police as a mechanism of Malay domination. Conversely, the majority Malay police force could perceive a contradictory bias and resent taking orders from Chinese or Indian officers. Periodic recruitment drives amongst the Chinese population had failed to redress the imbalance.[28]

The ethnic demographics of Singapore therefore created a security challenge for the British-dominated, imperialist-minded intelligence community. Geography provided another complex issue. Whilst the colony accounted for a total of 217 square miles, 75% of its population inhabited a 31 square mile urban area.[29] This created difficulties for security agencies in dealing with communist underground activities amongst the densely-packed urban masses, as well as communist hideouts in rural areas which posed their own difficulties. The open geography of rural Singapore was a particular problem in mounting surveillance operations.[30]

Urban geography had further implications for the security situation. According to a 1947 government survey, 58% of the municipal population lived in overcrowded or acutely overcrowded conditions. Health was a constant challenge (Singapore suffered a smallpox scare in 1959), and, fearing the financial implications, the colonial government refused to accept responsibility for housing. As noted by the revisionist Singapore historian Michael Barr, it is little surprise that Singapore became fertile ground for radical politics. On the one hand, Singapore appeared to be a prosperous city reaping the benefits of Western 'modernity' whilst remaining distinctly 'Asian'. It seemed to symbolise something equivalent to the American Dream for immigrant Chinese families. But it was also a place of squalor, neglect and inequality. The latter was typified by

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[28] TNA, CO 1035/8, JIC(56)36th meeting, 12 April 1956.
[29] CO 537/7247, The Leach Report, 17 May 1951, p. 2.
[30] FCO 141/14485, Memorandum by Alan Blades, 12 July 1951.

the racism endemic to colonialism, as well as seething inter-communal tensions between Chinese, Malay and Indian populations.[31]

Singapore was therefore more than just a strategic headquarters for British intelligence. It was also presented a set of challenging intelligence problems. This thesis offers an original approach to understanding Singapore's post-war history through the prism of intelligence and counter-subversion.

Within the historiography of Singapore, the dominant narrative is that of transition from colonial rule to independence. This nationalist and often linear history is sometimes dubbed 'the Singapore Story'. Lee Kuan Yew, one of the founders of the PAP, rapidly rose from being a potential dissident watched by the security services to being the Prime Minister who guided Singapore to independence: often by making good use of those same security services to quash his opposition. According to this narrative, Singapore's 'story' was a triumph of the wisdom of its architects (principally Lee) against a backdrop of vulnerability, isolation and smallness.[32] In explaining this 'story', imperial historians assessed the decolonisation of Singapore with reference to metropolitan weakness. Nationalist histories placed Britain's withdrawal not within a narrative of British decline but rather Singapore's concurrent emergence.[33]

The emergence of Singapore went through a number of distinct stages. In 1946-48, the focal point of Britain's interest in colonial restructuring was mainland Malaya. Singapore was sidelined. In the immediately following years, the outbreak of the communist 'Emergency' created a further barrier to engaging with reform. Very little constitutional development occurred until security forces had managed to suppress organised MCP resistance by the mid-1950s. Likewise, in the Federation of Malaya, constitutional progress did not gather meaningful momentum until after General Gerald Templer succeeded in breaking the back of the communist insurgency during 1952-54.

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[31] Barr, *Singapore*, p. 104.

[32] C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore, 1819-2005*, 2nd edn (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009); Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1998).

[33] Loh Kah Seng, 'The British Military Withdrawal from Singapore and the Anatomy of a Catalyst', in *Singapore in Global History*, ed. by Derek Heng and Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), pp. 195-214 (pp. 195-196); Yew Leung, 'Managing Plurality: The Politics of the Periphery in Early Cold War Singapore', *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 7(2) (2010), 159-177 (p. 160, 162).

In 1953, the conservative-leaning Progressive Party declared a ten-year target for self-government. Singapore's new Governor, John Fearns Nicoll, appointed a commission under the chairmanship of Sir George Rendel to instigate a comprehensive review of the constitution. This led to a new 'Rendel Constitution' which replaced the old Executive Council with a cabinet-style Council of Ministers. The Council was split between members appointed by the Governor and elected representatives. Singapore gained an elected Chief Minister, although power for defence and security, as well as overall authority, remained concentrated in the British Governor and his staff.

The Labour Front party won the elections of 1955, bringing the lawyer David Marshall to the office of Chief Minister. This was just the first stage towards independence. Britain was not willing to give more concessions to Singaporean nationalists until they were convinced that Singapore was 'safe' for decolonisation. They needed to believe that a successor government would prevent Singapore from falling to communism and ensure it remained pro-British and continue to play host to the British armed forces. As Chief Minister, Marshall staked his reputation on persuading Britain to accept a more rapid timetable for self-government. He resigned following the failure of his negotiations. Crucially, Marshall had repealed some of the Emergency Regulations, only to be faced with an upsurge of communist agitation. He was thus forced to create a new Preservation of Public Security Ordinance, effectively reversing his previous decision. As such, Marshall lost face locally and looked weak and indecisive to the British. London would not compromise with such a candidate. Marshall's successor, Lim Yew Hock, was more conservative and worked closely with the British security apparatus to combat communist activities from 1956-59. Consequently, Lim succeeded where Marshall had failed in negotiating with Britain for self-government.

At first a comparatively minor political force, the PAP was founded in October 1954. Its leader was Lee Kuan Yew, a young and ambitious Singaporean Chinese lawyer who became a person of great interest to British intelligence. The PAP flirted openly with known communists and certainly adopted a left-of-centre stance. This posed the question of whether Lee was tactically manipulating communist supporters for his own ends or whether he was a secret fellow

traveller. British intelligence agencies enjoyed frank contacts with Lee, and became securely convinced that he was not a communist. They soon became more concerned with whether Lee was strong enough to retain power within the hands of his party's moderates. In the end, action by Special Branch helped him to do so. Meanwhile, Lim Yew Hock agreed a timetable for self-government with London. The elections of May 1959 brought this to fulfilment, with a landslide victory for Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP.

This progress represents the nationalist narrative of Singaporean history during the period 1946-59. There have been a number of attempts to construct revisionist counter-narratives with a mixed record of success. Some of these attempts at providing a critical discourse, particularly in exploring the continuity in Singapore's 'culture of control' from pre-colonial to colonial and post-colonial times, have floundered in the political arena by focusing too much upon the PAP.[34] Although victorious in every general election from 1959, the PAP was not the sole driver of the emergence of modern Singapore. The MCP, which colonial authorities treated as a dissident, subversive and illegal entity, provided an alternative anti-colonial vision. Meanwhile, the colonial state had its own agency in driving Singapore's political development, and the police and intelligence services were a crucial part of this. Studying intelligence casts new light on the relationship between the British colonial authorities, the PAP and the MCP. It has implications for explaining why the PAP moved from a markedly left-wing agenda to being a more conservative political force.[35]

The MCP itself has been the subject of a few significant studies. Richard Clutterbuck's 1973 book provided an introduction to the MCP challenge which emphasised the transition from a violent campaign to an underground struggle and then to an open united front.[36] Alternatively, a more recent work by Singapore scholar Bilveer Singh adopted a thematic study of the MCP campaign. This is an appropriate tool for examining communist activities. Strategies such as terrorism,

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[34] Carl A. Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 107-136.

[35] On the PAP's complicity with anti-communist suppression after 1959, see: Matthew Jones, 'Creating Malaysia: Singapore Security, the Borneo Territories, and the Contours of British Policy, 1961-63', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 28(2) (2000), 85-109.

[36] Richard Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution in Singapore and Malaya, 1945-1963* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973).

united fronts, penetration of political parties, and industrial or educational subversion cannot be broken down into exclusive periods. The MCP pursued most of these strategies at any one time, as Singh effectively demonstrated. Unfortunately, Singh's book drew predominantly on secondary sources or published memoirs and document collections rather than archival material.[37] Looking through the archives of British intelligence, the picture that emerges is a hybrid between Clutterbuck's chronological and Singh's thematic models. Although intelligence actors were aware of the multi-pronged challenge presented by the MCP, they countered that challenge by focusing on what they perceived to be the biggest threat (where the MCP was seemingly placing most resources). This corresponds to Clutterbuck's three stages, producing in this thesis a narrative of counter-terrorism (chapter four), counter-subversion (chapter six) and counter-united front work (chapter seven). The adoption of a counter-subversion strategy by Special Branch did not mean that terrorist activities had halted. It simply meant that police action had reduced the frequency of such overt acts that they could focus on longer-term underground activities.

The final stage of this campaign, countering the communist united front, was examined by another Singapore historian, Lee Ting Hui. Lee made excellent use of sources including the testimony of ex-detainees and the internal security archives of post-1959 Singapore to explain how the MCP tried to use united front tactics to influence Singaporean politics.[38] By using British archival sources, the current thesis complements Lee's study. This thesis evaluates how British intelligence organisations perceived the changing communist threat and how they evolved strategies to counter it. These previous studies of the Singapore Emergency have all focused upon the MCP rather than the security forces which confronted it. The MCP ultimately failed to determine the outcome of the 'Singapore story'. Understanding how the intelligence services and the police made sure of this outcome is an important and overlooked aspect of Singapore's post-war history. Previously, research about Singapore Special Branch operations

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[37] Bilveer Singh, *Quest for Political Power: Communist Subversion and Militancy in Singapore* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2015).
[38] Lee Ting Hui, *The Open United Front: The Communist Struggle in Singapore, 1954-1966* (Singapore: South Seas Society, 1996). A shorter study, similarly focused on the united front mechanism, is: C. C. Chin, 'The United Front Strategy of the Malayan Communist Party in Singapore, 1950s-1960s', in *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore*, ed. by Michael D. Barr and Carl A. Trocki (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), pp. 58-77.

terminated with the fall of Singapore to Japan in 1942.[39] Because of the release of new documentary material in the UK National Archives in 2012-13, we can finally appreciate the important role of Special Branch during Singapore's post-war transitions.

Even in studies of the MCP challenge, the dominant scope is a strictly national one. Clutterbuck and Lee Ting Hui sought to explain the position of the MCP within Singapore's road to decolonisation, just as nationalist (and revisionist) discourses sought to explain the triumph of the PAP. Any connections between the 'Singapore story' and wider Cold War are largely implicit. However, a small body of scholarship has begun examining the international element of Singapore's post-war history. In an edited collection of 2011, Syed Aljunied and Derek Heng argued that Singapore was both 'metropole' and 'periphery'. Singapore was a location where global processes such as the Cold War and decolonisation impacted upon local development. It was equally a place from which transformative processes could emanate beyond Singapore's borders.[40] Their agenda is pertinent for the current thesis. The consolidation of a regional intelligence community transformed Singapore into something in-between a metropole and a 'traditional' colony. British intelligence agencies in Singapore construed a particular view of the Cold War. In turn, they coordinated clandestine activities from Singapore to pursue Cold War policies across the region.

A new history of Singapore by Michael Barr is representative of the emerging revisionist discourse. Barr noted that the most basic feature of Singapore's history is the continuity in Singapore's centrality to regional societal and commercial networks. In this regard, although Barr's work remained focused on Singapore itself, his revisionist discourse has helped to bridge the gap between parochial and international approaches to Singapore's history.[41] The history of Singapore from 1946-59 is also the history of the Cold War, Britain's uncomfortable readjustment to decline, and of the Malayan Emergency. By

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[39] Ban Kah Choon, *Absent History: The Untold Story of Special Branch Operations in Singapore, 1915-1942* (Singapore: Horizon Books, 2011). A possible exception is a popular history of operations against one MCP leader by the former Singapore Police Secretary: Peter Clague, *Iron Spearhead* (Singapore: Heinemann, 1980).

[40] Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied and Derek Heng, 'Globalising the History of Singapore', in *Singapore in Global History*, ed. by Heng and Aljunied, pp. 11-26 (pp. 18-19).

[41] Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, pp. 10-11.

focusing on one facet – intelligence – the current thesis helps to highlight the links between these national and international discourses.

The international aspect in new Singapore histories remains ripe for development. Both Albert Lau and Tan Tai Yong argued that the British approach to constitutional talks with Singaporean delegations was governed by security concerns in the context of the global Cold War.[42] Nevertheless, the voices of the actual intelligence and security services remain absent from these diplomatic perspectives. In a study of United States policy towards Singapore, S. R. Joey Long demonstrated how Washington's fear that Britain would be unable to prevent the fall of Singapore to communism determined American policies towards the island. Long also showed how the Americans unsuccessfully used covert operations to bolster pro-American sentiment and to gauge the stability of Lee Kuan Yew's regime.[43] The agency of British intelligence, meanwhile, is lost within his study. Nevertheless, the British had most to lose in Singapore's Cold War and greatest opportunity to influence events. The appreciations of British intelligence were an important means of reassuring policy-makers that Singapore was 'safe' for decolonisation.

By looking at intelligence, this thesis therefore contributes to the developing historiography of Singapore through linking local developments with the broader international context. Singapore was the centre of all British intelligence activity in the Far East. It was also an important hub of local intelligence activities, where security concerns about the tenability of a non-communist Southeast Asia were mirrored at the internal level. Understanding these interactions not only tells us something about British intelligence during the Cold War, but also helps explain why Singapore developed along a particular path during the final stages of colonial rule.

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[42] Albert Lau, 'Decolonisation and the Cold War in Singapore, 1955-9', in *Southeast Asia and the Cold War*, ed. by Albert Lau (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 43-66; Tan Tai Yong, 'The Cold War and the Making of Singapore', in *Cold War Southeast Asia*, ed. by Malcolm H. Murfett (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2012), pp. 132-163.

[43] S. R. Joey Long, *Safe for Decolonisation: The Eisenhower Administration, Britain and Singapore* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2011), pp. 154-178.

Understanding intelligence: definitions, concepts and processes

The literature on intelligence studies is perhaps as broad (and at times nebulously defined) as the responsibilities of the Commissioner General's organisation. Before beginning to explore the British intelligence communities in Singapore, it is prudent to examine some of the core definitions and concepts upon which this analysis rests. This section considers what is meant by 'intelligence'. It then interrogates the concept of an 'intelligence cycle', particularly focusing on ideas about intelligence processes and assessment. From this analysis, we come to an understanding of intelligence which is applicable to the particular intelligence milieu under scrutiny.

Perhaps the most problematic concept in intelligence history is defining 'intelligence' itself. Former JIC secretary Michael Herman explained that there can be narrow, middle and broad views of what constitutes 'intelligence'.[44] In its most narrow sense, intelligence is information about a potential adversary which that adversary does not wish to be known.[45] Clandestine collection services are required to acquire this intelligence. As Herman observed, 'intelligence collection is directed against targets that do not consent to it and usually take measures to frustrate it'.[46]

At the broadest end of the spectrum, intelligence is the sum of available knowledge on a particular subject. This definition incorporates covert material, confidential information and publicly-accessible data. However, it has been well noted by Philip Davies that this broad definition is little different from the basic functions of the civil service.[47] Such collation was the work of agencies including the Foreign Office Research Department (FORD), not the secret services. Neither the producers of intelligence nor its consumers (or users) in government would equate the work of FORD with the work of SIS or MI5. Indeed, the need to maintain a distinction (and deniability) between the ordinary work of government and the world of intelligence is arguably one of the reasons that secret services

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[44] Michael Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 114.
[45] Thomas F. Troy, 'The "Correct" Definition of Intelligence', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 5(4) (1991), 433-454 (p. 447).
[46] Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, p. 133.
[47] Philip H. J. Davies, *MI6 and the Machinery of Spying* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), p. 10.

came into being. A narrower definition of intelligence would appear more in accordance with the self-defined functions of the British intelligence community, particularly the 'secret' services.[48] Intelligence could thus be said to be the activity undertaken by covert information agencies.

However, too narrow a definition appears equally out of sync with the way producers and consumers of intelligence understood the concept during the Cold War. Secretive bureaucracies were created to deal with non-secretive sources, incorporating 'open source' information and 'grey' intelligence. The latter referred to material that was not widely diffused but which was not regarded as a matter of national security, such as confidential economic reports or trade literature.[49] Examples of grey and open intelligence abound in this thesis, including the JIB, 'China Bureau' and the Regional Information Office (RIO).

Even when adopting a more middle-ground approach, the emphasis remains on the agency producing this material, and the uses to which it was applied. Intelligence thus can be described as what covert or semi-covert agencies 'do', even if the raw material they use is sometimes less than secret. Michael Herman suggested that 'intelligence is somehow rooted in concealment […] its techniques derive their special character from dealing with this deliberately created obscurity'. This does not imply a narrow focus on covert sources. Intelligence assessment should be holistic and all-source.[50] But the subjects targeted usually involve some degree of secrecy even if open sources are used to penetrate them. This understanding would fit with the way that British intelligence approached the creation of communist China (as discussed in chapter five).

Consequently, we have moved away from one of the three approaches of intelligence outlined by the American practitioner and theorist Sherman Kent. In a well-known triptych, Kent defined intelligence as knowledge, organisation, and activity.[51] If defining intelligence as a particular type of knowledge remains

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[48] Philip H. J. Davies, *Intelligence and Government in Britain and the United States, Volume 2: Evolution of the UK Intelligence Community* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012), pp. 4-5.

[49] Huw Dylan, *Defence Intelligence and the Cold War: Britain's Joint Intelligence Bureau 1945-1964* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 36-37.

[50] Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, p. 131.

[51] Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 3, 69, 151.

problematic, then perhaps the answer lies in defining that knowledge with reference to the organisations and activities that produce it.

Major Robert Harry Mathams, an Australian scientific intelligence specialist, carefully distinguished between 'information' and 'intelligence'. As Mathams explained, 'information is the raw material from which intelligence is produced'. Information can come from a variety of sources but becomes intelligence through being processed in a specific manner by a specific bureaucracy.[52] Likewise, CIA analyst and in-house historian Thomas F. Troy wrote that 'intelligence per se is subjective. Like beauty, it is in the eye of the beholder'.[53] Troy's observation is a useful reminder that intelligence (defined as knowledge) needs to have some purpose or relevance, conferred through being part of a particular organisation or activity. Similarly, Herman noted that intelligence usually has a more restricted *de facto* meaning than just 'information'. It has associations with international relations, defence, national security and state secrecy.[54] Perhaps the solution is to understand intelligence in terms of the way it is handled and used: who creates it, how they create it, the form in which it is presented, who receives it, and what they do with it.

Of course, no conceptualisation or definition of intelligence is perfect or universal. Personal, departmental and national predilections all have an effect. This thesis is not about the construction of an understanding of intelligence, and this opening discussion is purely intended to outline some of the potential problems – and opportunities – in different approaches to what constitutes intelligence. Such definitions became a bone of contention between some of the key agencies discussed in this thesis. For the sake of clarity, it is possible to construct a basic definition which adequately fits the varying perceptions and priorities of the individuals and organisations dealt with hereon. Such a definition could be approximated by the following statement:

> Intelligence is information pertinent to pursuing the strategic, foreign policy and national security objectives of a state or organisation. It is collected and processed by a self-defined intelligence community, the

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[52] R. H. Mathams, *Sub Rosa: Memoirs of an Australian Intelligence Analyst* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. 2.
[53] Troy, 'The Correct Definition of Intelligence', p. 449.
[54] Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, p. 1.

status of which is generally accepted by its consumers. Whilst the definition of what material constitutes intelligence can be broad, what makes this 'intelligence' is the special way it is treated by a special bureaucracy.

It is accepted that such a definition is as imperfect as any other yet proposed, and is only offered for the sake of guiding this specific discussion. It asserts the importance of the use of intelligence (within the foreign policy or national security process), the self-awareness of the community which produces and uses it, and the way in which it is put together.

Discussing concepts such as the 'collection', 'processing' or 'consumption' of intelligence, brings to mind another controversial topic: the intelligence cycle. The bedrock of teaching on intelligence, the cycle is normally constructed of five distinct stages: planning or direction, collection (sometimes referred to as raw production), processing, analysis, and dissemination. Perhaps the most important stages are those of processing and assessment, by which raw information is transformed into 'intelligence'.[55]

However, the intelligence cycle has come under increasing criticism. In particular, it seems to miss out important elements of the intelligence process such as covert action, counterintelligence and political oversight. Moreover, the standard, linear cycle distorts the reality that collection (the intake of raw information) and assessment (the transformation of this into 'finished' intelligence) are often interactive and occur concurrently.[56] It also does not account for the reality that users of intelligence are sometimes delivered raw information. A ready example of this is Winston Churchill's hearty appetite for raw 'Ultra' decrypts during the Second World War.[57]

Furthermore, the cycle does not account for what happens following dissemination. Intelligence is just one dimension of the policy-making process,

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[55] Mark Phythian, 'Introduction: Beyond the Intelligence Cycle?', in *Understanding the Intelligence Cycle*, ed. by Mark Phythian (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1-8 (pp. 3-4).
[56] Peter Gill and Mark Phythian, 'From Intelligence Cycle to Web of Intelligence: Complexity and the Conceptualisation of Intelligence', in *Understanding the Intelligence Cycle*, ed. by Phythian, pp. 21-42.
[57] Richard Aldrich, *GCHQ* (London: Harper Press, 2010), p. 1.

and we must be careful to avoid attributing undue influence.[58] Intelligence reports compete for influence with political interests, the personalities and preconceptions of policy-makers, and contradictory intelligence summaries. Indeed, intelligence does not contain separable elements of facts and interpretation. Most of its value comes from the application of interpretation of some kind. Even with all-source assessment, subjectivity can never be truly eliminated.[59] Therefore, there is no guarantee that policy-makers will accept the interpretations of intelligence agencies over their own interpretative preferences. Even if intelligence is influential upon policy-makers, this does not guarantee an intended outcome. Despite rigorous evaluation, intelligence can get things wrong. Factors wholly exogenous to the typical intelligence cycle, such as the relative openness of a target regime, or that regime's capacity for successful disinformation, can be just as influential on intelligence outcomes.[60] This critique suggests that the intelligence cycle is a distortion of reality. It can equally be indicted as a simplification of those processes which it otherwise accurately describes. This is most clear with regard to the direction and assessments stages.

A useful framework for understanding intelligence direction is that of 'push and pull' business architectures as described by the historian Philip Davies. Push organisations are self-tasking, presenting their results to convince users of their priorities and choices. In contrast, in pull architectures, consumers select targets and direct collection agencies to fulfil them. In the Anglo-American intelligence communities, pull architectures are predominant.[61] This concept of pull is most compatible with the traditional intelligence cycle, in which collection agencies are set tasks in the direction phase. In the Cold War British system, users such as the Foreign Office and Chiefs of Staff Committee either articulated requirements directly to the collection agencies, or via the national intelligence requirements set by the JIC (subordinate to the Chiefs of Staff until 1957).

However, this is an incomplete picture. Collection agencies also can be self-tasking, and lines of authority are often far from simple, particularly with

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[58] Antony Best, British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia, 1914-1941 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 2.

[59] Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, p. 42.

[60] Michael Warner, 'The Past and Future of the Intelligence Cycle', in *Understanding the Intelligence Cycle*, ed. by Phythian, pp. 9-20 (p. 15).

[61] Davies, *MI6 and the Machinery of Spying*, pp. 13-16.

regard to the post-1945 British intelligence community in Singapore.[62] Many of the agencies discussed in this thesis were subject to direction from their own chiefs, parent organisations in London, user departments based in Singapore, and the national intelligence effort. A more useful version of the intelligence cycle should acknowledge the complexity inherent in intelligence direction.

In a similar vein, intelligence assessment is a more complex, multi-stage process than accounted for by the simple intelligence cycle. Expanding on Michael Herman's theorisations, a more nuanced assessments cycle could be seen as comprising:

1. Collation: bringing together information from various outlets (including different departments or field stations within the same agency). This activity was a primary function of Singapore-based agencies including SIFE, the JIB and SIS(FE).

2. Evaluation: making judgements about the reliability or credibility of information based on its source history, cross-referencing and other factors. The Singapore Special Branch used the 'Admiralty system' for grading reliability and credibility (see table 4.2).

3. Analysis: identifying significant facts and comparing them to existing knowledge. The agencies involved in the collation of intelligence in Singapore were equally involved in its evaluation and analysis, before passing on to other agencies.

4. Integration: bringing together analysed information from various sources and looking for patterns or points of discord. This equates to what is usually referred to as all-source analysis, and was carried out in Singapore by the Joint Intelligence Staff which was subsidiary to the JIC(FE).

5. Interpretation: using the integrated intelligence to try to determine what it means for the future. This function was particularly evident in JIC(FE) assessments.[63]

Although this appears a linear list, these stages can just as easily be concurrent – as shown by the involvement of SIFE in collation, evaluation and analysis – and

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[62] Davies, *Evolution of the UK Intelligence Community*, p. 55.
[63] Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, p. 100.

can sometimes be skipped entirely. The intelligence cycle, which usually equates this multi-faceted process to one or two stages, is a gross simplification.

The perfect intelligence cycle is as chimerical as the perfect definition of intelligence. Indeed, one can wonder whether it is helpful to reduce the intelligence process to a diagram smacking of universalism. One could argue that a precise definition or diagrammatic description of intelligence is as unknowable and incomprehensible as the eldritch gods of the horror writer H. P. Lovecraft.

Yet producing such definitions and diagrams remains a useful means of communicating ideas about intelligence. To that end, a modified intelligence cycle is here proposed which meets most of the critiques outlined above and has the virtue of explaining the core stages and key relationships entailed in this thesis (see figure 1.1). This is not intended to be a universal model but one which broadly fits the British intelligence system in Singapore during the Cold War. The term 'assessment' is used to avoid confusion with the more specific terminology discussed above. At least one of the stages of collation, analysis, evaluation, integration and interpretation are involved at each level of assessment outlined below. The collection stage is merged with the concept of 'action', acknowledging that intelligence collection agencies are sometimes involved in covert action or clandestine propaganda. This is not to say that these processes are the same thing. Covert action is not intelligence collection, although the same agencies can be involved in both – and operations designed to implement one can lead to the other. This duality is particularly important at the local level, as Special Branch operations (typically including raids on suspect addresses and the detention of suspects) were at the same time 'action' operations informed by previous intelligence and 'collection' operations designed to gather new data for analysis.
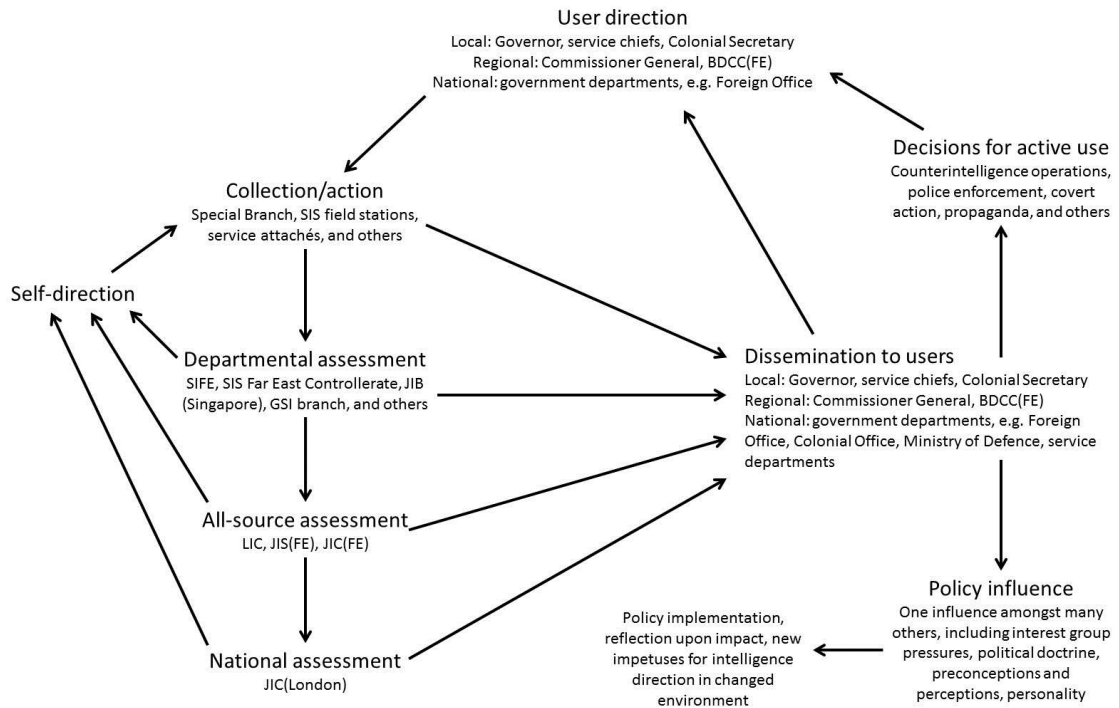
Figure 1.1. An 'intelligence cycle' for Cold War Singapore.

Having proposed a working definition of intelligence and something akin to a cycle or process, it is opportune to examine some more practical concepts implicit within this intelligence cycle. Namely, these are the idea of the intelligence report, the notion of an intelligence community, and the concept of national intelligence.

Both Sherman Kent and Michael Herman (who were intelligence practitioners before they were intelligence theorists) proposed three different classes of finished intelligence report.[64] The documentation consulted for this thesis supports this distinction. Firstly, there are 'basic descriptive' reports such as military orders-of-battle, economic fact-files or encyclopaedic country studies which provided strategic planners with background knowledge about a country of interest.[65] The reportage of the JIB network, particularly the 1953 report on Sino-Soviet cooperation by the Australian JIB discussed in chapter five, were examples

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[64] Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, p. 8; Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, pp. 134-135.
[65] Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, p. 135.

of this type of report. Secondly, there are 'current reportorial' reports which deal with very recent events. These keep track of the modalities of change.[66] The SIFE monthly reviews of communism which are discussed throughout chapter three fell into this category, as did many of the local political intelligence reports and monthly or fortnightly Special Branch reports found in chapters four and six. Finally, perhaps the most important but least voluminous type of intelligence report is the 'speculative-evaluative' which have a mid to long-range forecasting function. Examples of this type included JIC(FE) predictions of likely developments in neighbouring states, which typically offered forecasts over a three year period.[67]

This thesis is concerned with the output of intelligence in the form of such reports, their influence on policy-makers (where this is possible to trace), and the role of intelligence agencies in promulgating action. It is equally concerned with the activities or processes inherent in intelligence production and the complexities of intelligence organisation. In order to approach intelligence organisation in Singapore, the concepts of intelligence communities and national intelligence are paramount.

The concept of an 'intelligence community' is, broadly speaking, an Anglophilic one. It refers to the recognition that intelligence forms part of an orderly system organised at the national level.[68] More specifically, Philip Davies has suggested that it is a particularly American conception of intelligence organisation, which is approximated in the United Kingdom by the so-called national intelligence system. Because the JIC, the centre of Britain's national intelligence effort, is more concerned with organising *activities* than coordinating *agencies*, the membership of this community is more fluid than its American counterpart.[69] This can be seen with the British intelligence 'community' in Singapore, where certain agencies including the Malayan Security Service were temporarily co-opted into the regional JIC, and observers from allied (Australian

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[66] Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, p. 30.
[67] Examples from TNA include: FO 959/82, JIC(FE)(50)6(Final), 'Likely Developments in Indonesia in the Period up to the End of 1952', July 1950. The same folder contains comparable reports on Burma and Indochina.
[68] Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, p. 27.
[69] Davies, *Evolution of the UK Intelligence Community*, p. 15.

and American) intelligence agencies were sometimes allowed into its notional community.

For Davies, the key features of the British national intelligence system (or community) can be described as:

1. A corpus of intelligence collection agencies and departments. Examples from Singapore included SIS(FE) and its field stations.
2. A complex of joint bodies which integrate intelligence at the operational level. Pertinent examples included the JIB and the Joint Air Photographic Intelligence Centre, Far East – JAPIC(FE).
3. The Joint Intelligence Committee, which coordinates at the executive level. Singapore housed the JIC(FE), subordinate to the national JIC in London.
4. Working-level interagency committees and teams operating under the JIC. This description would include the Joint Air Photographic Intelligence Board, Far East, which set requirements for the JAPIC(FE).
5. A network of Cabinet Office committees and staffs that function alongside and above the joint intelligence organisation.[70] In Cold War Singapore, this was approximated by the British Defence Coordination Committee, Far East.

This brief exposition could appear to suggest that there was a British intelligence community in Singapore bearing a direct resemblance to the national intelligence community in the imperial metropole. However, the reality is more nuanced.

Singapore was the focal point of all British intelligence activities in Southeast Asia and most activities in the Far East. The Far East, as understood by British intelligence and their consumers at the time, was synonymous with today's concepts of East plus Southeast Asia. These activities took place on three levels: the local (concerned with just one state), the regional (concerned with developments across the region) and the national (the United Kingdom's national intelligence effort).

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[70] Davies, *Evolution of the UK Intelligence Community*, p. 15.

The regional and national levels were usually closely coordinated, as most of the regional-level collection and assessment agencies were offshoots of national organisations such as MI5, SIS and the JIC. In contrast, greater disparity was present between the local and the regional-national. Although the JIC(FE), SIFE and MI5 weighed in with advice on local intelligence activities within Singapore, they were rarely directly concerned with, or overly interested in, the local intelligence output. Greater interest in local developments became apparent from the mid-1950s, and accelerated in the period of 1959-1963, when the future of the Singapore base became an issue for national policy.[71]

Nevertheless, there are certain traits in common between the local, regional and national levels of intelligence which corresponded to a particularly British intelligence model. Prominent examples included the depoliticisation and demilitarisation of security intelligence by placing it within the police (Special Branch) or a civilian security service (MI5). During the withdrawal from Empire, Britain enjoyed some (but not complete) success in exporting a British intelligence model to the Commonwealth successor states. In both the old 'white' Dominions like Australia and new nations across Asia and Africa, British officials helped build intelligence services based upon their national model.[72] This thesis considers how Britain sought to spread this model outside the Empire-Commonwealth by offering advice and training to nations such as Laos and Thailand, as well as how the local intelligence services in Singapore were prepared for self-government.

Intelligence communities comprise a number of differently-focused agencies conducting different 'types' of intelligence. These are varyingly defined with reference to the source material they use, the sort of target they gather

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[71] On post-1959 British approaches to defence and security in Singapore, see: Jones, 'Creating Malaysia'; Simon J. Ball, 'Selkirk in Singapore', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10(2) (1999), 162-191.

[72] Daniel W. B. Lomas, *Intelligence, Security and the Attlee Governments, 1945-51* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 231-238; Calder Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War and the Twilight of Empire* (London: William Collins, 2013), pp. 145-146; Christopher Andrew, 'The Growth of the Australian Intelligence Community and the Anglo-American Connection', *Intelligence and National Security*, 4(2) (1989), 213-256 (pp. 226-230); Chikara Hashimoto, 'The Training of Secret Police in Conflictual Intelligence Cultures: British Failure in the Middle East during the Cold War', *International History Review*, 39(3) (2017), 450-469 (pp. 450-452); Philip Murphy, 'Creating a Commonwealth Intelligence Culture: The View from Central Africa', *Intelligence and National Security*, 17(3) (2002), 131-162 (p. 135).

information upon, who they gather information for, or who makes up their internal organisation. For example, the agency SIFE, an offshoot of MI5, specialised in security intelligence. This can be defined as intelligence pertinent to the national security of the state, including information about opposition intelligence activities (counter-espionage), subversive movements (counter-subversion) and the physical safeguarding of information (protective security). Defining what constituted national security intelligence in the colonial context created divisive power rivalries between the national, regional and local levels of intelligence. Meanwhile, SIS collected foreign intelligence: intelligence about the intentions, capabilities and society of foreign states. Their main source of information was what is generally known as human intelligence, or espionage.

Aside from human intelligence, there were three major types of intelligence collection undertaken by the British intelligence apparatus in Singapore. These were signals intelligence, image intelligence and open source intelligence. Signals intelligence is conventionally divided between electronic intelligence (such as radar patterns) and communications intelligence (based on the interception of communications). In turn, communications intelligence can include cryptography (the breaking of codes and ciphers to read communications), traffic analysis (analysing patterns in undeciphered messages) and direction finding.[73] The latter was particularly useful to signals intelligence agencies in Singapore before the Japanese invasion of Malaya in December 1941 as a way of keeping track of Japanese naval movements.[74]

Image intelligence today incorporates a wider variety of technologies and techniques. During the early Cold War, it was essentially the use of aerial photography taken by specialised or modified aircraft. The British Far Eastern Air Force included various aircraft modified for this purpose, including Meteor jet fighters and Pembroke or Valetta light transports, and eventually the more specialised Canberra Photographic Reconnaissance mark 3 'spyplane'.

In addition to these more secretive types of intelligence collection, open source intelligence was a significant field. Users of intelligence at the national and

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[73] Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, pp. 69-70.
[74] Richard J. Aldrich, *Intelligence and the War against Japan: Britain, America and the Politics of Secret Service* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 37

regional levels saw potential in applying open source information to provide background insight into closed societies such as communist China or North Vietnam which were proving difficult targets for the clandestine collection methods of SIS. These were not only very security-conscious societies, but also ones in which European intelligence officers – given the restrictions on travel – would clearly stand out.

Alternatively, some agencies are more defined by their organisational character and hierarchies. All three armed services maintained intelligence departments at the national and regional levels. These service intelligence directorates are sometimes referred to as collecting 'military' or 'defence' intelligence. The term 'service' is preferable to 'military' as the latter only properly includes the army. Likewise, the term 'defence' has too many connotations with the Ministry of Defence, whereas the service directorates were responsible to separate ministries. They relied heavily upon open source intelligence along with some lower-level human intelligence including interviewing refugees fleeing China.

A 'missing dimension'?

Since it was first used by Christopher Andrew and David Dilks in 1984, the phrase 'missing dimension' has become a familiar concept in intelligence history. For Andrew and Dilks, international historians had overlooked the crucial role of intelligence in modern history. Since this time, intelligence history has proliferated rapidly. In Britain this was partly facilitated by greater public acknowledgement ushered in by the 1989 Security Service Act, followed by limited but academically significant releases by various intelligence services to the UK National Archives.[75] This was a transformation from the previous official attitude. As noted by two intelligence historians, 'for most of the twentieth century, the culture within Whitehall towards intelligence was broadly the same as

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[75] Christopher J. Moran, 'The Pursuit of Intelligence History: Methods, Sources and Trajectories', in *Spooked: Britain, Empire and Intelligence since 1945*, ed. by Patrick Major and Christopher R. Moran (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 1-28 (p. 3, 10-11).

the Victorian attitude towards sex: although it obviously took place, it was improper to discuss it'.[76]

Nevertheless, the idea of a 'missing dimension' persists. In 2001, Richard Aldrich drew attention to the specific problems of researching Cold War intelligence. Whilst secret intelligence had become fully integrated into the history of the Second World War, Cold War clandestine activities remained less understood. As Aldrich acknowledged, this was due to the majority of records remaining closed: 'viewing the subject as being like a distant iceberg, with the immense bulk of its matter still dangerously submerged, some commentators have decided to steer well clear'.[77] Of course, as Aldrich's own research showed, the lack of records directly produced by the intelligence services should not prevent historians from discovering their activities in records affiliated with their user or consumer departments. Whilst the available picture of Cold War intelligence may be imperfect and often fragmented, it does exist.[78] Following Aldrich's lead, numerous scholars have done much to dispel the 'missing dimension' in Cold War history.

Perhaps a more pervasive application of the 'missing dimension' is that of the role of intelligence during the end of empire. In 2010, Calder Walton and Christopher Andrew observed that, despite plenty of studies of colonial policing and political intelligence, the role of the national intelligence community in decolonisation was a 'missing dimension'.[79] Their observation was shared by historians including Martin Thomas and Philip Murphy.[80] The current author contends that Walton and Andrew underestimate the role of what they dismiss as 'political' or 'police' intelligence to national security. Nevertheless, their observation regarding a disparity between studies of national intelligence and

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[76] Calder Walton and Christopher Andrew, 'Still the "Missing Dimension": British Intelligence and the Historiography of British Decolonisation', in *Spooked*, ed. by Major and Moran, pp. 73-96 (p. 79).

[77] Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London: John Murray, 2001), pp. 637-638.

[78] Matthew M. Aid and Cees Wiebes, 'Introduction: The Importance of Signals Intelligence in the Cold War', in *Secrets of Signals Intelligence*, ed. by Aid and Wiebes, pp. 1-26 (p. 1).

[79] Walton and Andrew, 'Still the Missing Dimension', p. 75.

[80] Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 13; Philip Murphy, 'Intelligence and Decolonisation: The Life and Death of the Federal Intelligence and Security Bureau, 1954-63', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 29(2) (2001), 101-130 (p. 101).

studies of colonial intelligence is apt. More recent historians have helped ameliorate this discrepancy by reflecting on the involvement of national or regional intelligence agencies in local problems.[81] However, more work remains to be done to integrate national agendas with local realities, particularly in the British approach to Southeast Asia. This is a 'missing dimension' which this thesis helps to fill.

The release of the so-called 'Migrated Archives' of the former Colonial Office in 2012-13 makes it possible to integrate national, regional and local (or colonial) intelligence agendas to a greater extent than hitherto. These consist of records returned and concealed rather than be handed over to post-colonial states. Originally four criteria were applied in selecting documents for 'migration':

1. Those which might embarrass the UK or local government.
2. Those which might embarrass members of the police, military forces, public servants or others, e.g. police informers.
3. Those which might compromise sources of intelligence information.
4. Those which might be used unethically by ministers in a successive government.[82]

Much attention has been devoted to those files relating to the embarrassing issue of complicity in torture and brutality in counterinsurgency campaigns such as the Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya and the Cyprus Emergency. Thus far, the files from Singapore (totalling around 2800 individual files) have garnered less attention than those from neighbouring territories in Southeast Asia.[83] However, whilst lacking the allure of scandal and embarrassment, they contain significant tracts of intelligence data.

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[81] Rory Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies: British Intelligence and Counterinsurgency* (London: Hurst, 2013); Chikara Hashimoto, *The Twilight of the British Empire: British Intelligence and Counter-Subversion in the Middle East, 1945-63* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

[82] Anthony Badger, 'Historians, a Legacy of Suspicion and the "Migrated Archives"', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 23(4-5) (2012), 799-807 (pp. 799-800).

[83] Studies of Malaya, Borneo and Brunei which have made extensive use of the Migrated Archives include: Edward Hampshire, '"Apply the Flame More Searingly": The Destruction and Migration of the Archives of British Colonial Administration: A Southeast Asian Case Study', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41(2) (2013), 334-352; David Phillips, 'The "Migrated Archives" and a Forgotten Corner of Empire: The Borneo Territories', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 44(6) (2016), 1001-1019; Alexander Nicholas Shaw, 'British Counterinsurgency in Brunei and Sarawak, 1962-1963: Developing Best Practices in the Shadow of Malaya', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27(4) (2016), 702-725.

It could be argued that the lack of a detailed history of British intelligence in Singapore is itself a 'missing dimension'.[84] This thesis casts light on the history of a number of marginalised intelligence agencies, ranging from far-reaching organisations with metropolitan links to highly specialised and more localised units. However, to borrow a phrase from Rory Cormac, as interesting as this may be, 'the *so what* question remains'.[85]

As well as filling several institutional gaps, this thesis aims to shed new light on two broader 'missing dimensions' within the existing historiography. Firstly, it aims to provide analysis of the organisation, working culture and impact of a specific intelligence milieu during the Cold War. More broadly, this benefits our understanding of wider issues surrounding late-imperial intelligence organisation and the significance of clandestine activities to Britain's Cold War and decolonisation policies in the Far East. In particular, the thesis focuses on security intelligence and its relative status within the intelligence hierarchy centred upon Singapore. Security intelligence attained a position at the heart of the intelligence system. On the local level, Special Branch led the fight against communist elements within Singapore. Regionally, SIFE became one of the preferred forums for intelligence advice to the Commissioner General. Nationally, the MI5 worked to ensure the retention of British influence following the withdrawal from empire. This position of prominence was not inevitable. Rather, it was at odds with the initial decisions taken by policy-makers in constructing a three-tier intelligence system for the Far East. The following chapters explain why and how security intelligence became so integral.

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[84] The main exceptions are an article about SIFE written by the current author, and an unpublished thesis with a strong focus on RIO by Thomas Maguire: Alexander Nicholas Shaw, 'MI5 and the Cold War in South-East Asia: Examining the Performance of Security Intelligence Far East (SIFE), 1946-1963', Intelligence and National Security, 32(6) (2017), 797-816; Thomas Maguire, 'British and American Intelligence and Anti-Communist Propaganda in Early Cold War Southeast Asia, 1948-1961' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2015). The early history of SIFE and the JIC(FE) in relation to the Malayan Emergency is also discussed in Roger Arditti's doctoral thesis, but Arditti does not explore the larger Southeast Asian picture, and differs greatly from the current author in assessing the effectiveness of various agencies. See: Roger Arditti, '"Our Achilles' Heel": Interagency Intelligence during the Malayan Emergency' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Brunel University, 2015).

[85] Rory Cormac, 'The Pinprick Approach: Whitehall's Top Secret Anti-Communist Committee and the Evolution of British Covert Action Strategy', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 16(3) (2014), 5-28 (p. 12).

A second 'missing dimension' is the 'intelligence gap' in our understanding of Singapore's post-war history. This also has implications for the concurrent 'Malayan Emergency' from 1948-60. The period under question, beginning with the resumption of civilian rule in 1946 and ending with the attainment of internal self-government in 1959, was one of immense change for Singapore and has attracted a range of historical methodologies. However, comparatively little has been written about Singapore's place in Britain's Cold War, despite being the centre of the Far Eastern regional administration and an anti-communist battleground in its own right. Even less has been said about the role of intelligence during this period of international tension and local transition.

As a thesis primarily about British intelligence, this discussion draws upon an increasing corpus of literature about Britain's secret services during the Cold War. The historiography of British intelligence in the twentieth century is fortunate to encompass a variety of methodologies and conceptual or geographical focuses.

Official histories are one of the noteworthy features of this landscape. Although their reliance on sources unavailable for cross-checking can be frustrating, these histories are useful for providing a detailed inside view of the organisation, priorities and sometimes practices of several key agencies. As well as the seminal official histories of MI5 and SIS, there are now authorised histories of British defence economic intelligence (principally the JIB and its successor, the Defence Intelligence Staff) and an initial volume of the national JIC ending in 1957.[86] From an international perspective, the first of the three volumes of the official history of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) contains a detailed exposition of the involvement of MI5 officers in its creation, as well as hinting at some of the liaison between ASIO and SIFE.[87]

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[86] Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorised History of MI5* (London: Allen Lance, 2009); Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service, 1909-1949* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010); Peter Davies, *The Authorised History of British Defence Economic Intelligence: A Cold War in Whitehall, 1929-90* (London: Routledge, 2018); Michael S. Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee, Volume I: From the Approach of the Second World War to the Suez Crisis* (London: Routledge, 2014)

[87] David Horner, *The Spy Catchers: The Official History of ASIO, 1949-1963* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2014).

As well as authorised histories, there are equally insightful unofficial histories of specific agencies based on publically available declassified documents. These include organisational histories of GCHQ by Richard Aldrich and the Foreign Office Information Research Department (IRD) by Andrew Defty.[88] Aldrich's earlier work, *The Hidden Hand*, remains the most encompassing survey of British and American intelligence activity during the first two decades of the Cold War.[89] Although the official history of SIS terminated in 1949, insight into subsequent SIS activities can be found in Philip Davies' organisation-heavy account or the more sensationalist treatments by Gordon Corera and Stephen Dorril.[90] Joining the official history of the JIC, Rory Cormac's 2013 monograph provided a more detailed examination of the involvement of the JIC in post-war colonial counterinsurgency.[91] Cormac's more recent book gave the most complete account of covert action in British policy to date, building on a previous article exploring the Whitehall mechanism for coordinating covert action.[92] This relationship between policy-makers and the national intelligence community is also undergoing increasing scrutiny, typified by two recent studies of the relationship between Prime Ministers and intelligence.[93] In a similar vein, the current study considers the evolving relationship between the Commissioner General for Southeast Asia and his intelligence apparatus. By proving their indispensability to the Cold War priorities of the Commissioner General, intelligence agencies such as SIFE successfully deflected metropolitan pressures to reform and economise.

This corpus of work provides an improving picture of Britain's national intelligence community during the Cold War. In studying the intelligence apparatus in Singapore, some more specific debates are important. Foremost is that highlighted by Andrew and Walton when referring to the role of national

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[88] Aldrich, *GCHQ*; Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53: The Information Research Department* (London: Routledge, 2004).

[89] Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*.

[90] Davies, *MI6 and the Machinery of Spying*; Gordon Corera, *MI6: Life and Death in the British Secret Service* (London: Phoenix, 2012); Stephen Dorril, *MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations* (London: Fourth Estate, 2001).

[91] Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies*.

[92] Rory Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny: Spies, Special Forces and the Secret Pursuit of British Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Cormac, 'The Pinprick Approach'.

[93] Richard J. Aldrich and Rory Cormac, *The Black Door: Spies, Secret Intelligence and British Prime Ministers* (London: William Collins, 2016); Lomas, *Intelligence, Security and the Attlee Governments*.

intelligence agencies in decolonisation as a 'missing dimension'. Their argument implies an essential difference between the work of colonial Special Branches, and the security intelligence remit of MI5 or SIFE.[94] Such a distinction was debated by intelligence practitioners and users during the Cold War and implicitly linked with power relationships. However, the Singapore Special Branch was as much a security intelligence agency as MI5, as it was responsible for producing intelligence about subversive or espionage threats vital to the maintenance of national security. It did, however, have a different working culture to MI5 due to its position within the police, giving Special Branch powers of arrest and detention. Walton and Andrew's argument can be criticised for overly defining the situation of the 1950s by more modern distinctions in intelligence. Intelligence during the early Cold War should be studied in relation to the specific situation of those times, in which a range of actors contributed to security intelligence in response to a diverse array of international and colonial threats.

A number of historians have grappled with this relationship between colonial policing and security intelligence. Georgina Sinclair noted that the increasing globalisation of the Cold War led to a major expansion in the intelligence requirements of colonial police forces.[95] Likewise, in a study of political intelligence in the Gold Coast (Ghana), Richard Rathbone suggested that the 1948 crisis, interpreted with reference to imperial security concerns about communism, signified a change in the nature of the colonial state. This change resulted in an upsurge of local intelligence activity driven by a schizophrenic approach to communism. Whilst reporting that there was very little evidence of communist activity, colonial officials obsessively searched for it.[96] Comparisons are easy to draw with some of the early regional intelligence assessments from Singapore.

The importance of security intelligence for colonial stability is acknowledged by a diverse range of scholarly theories. Christopher Bayly's ideas about colonial knowledge and intelligence in India emphasised the limitations of

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[94] Walton and Andrew, 'Still the Missing Dimension', p. 81.
[95] Georgina Sinclair, *At the End of the Line: Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame, 1945-80* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 56.
[96] Richard Rathbone, 'Political Intelligence and Policing in Ghana in the late 1940s and 1950s', in *Policing and Decolonisation: Politics, Nationalism and the Police*, ed. by David M. Anderson and David Killingray (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 84-104 (pp. 90-91, 100).

colonial intelligence. Where colonial knowledge failed to mesh with indigenous society, racial stereotypes distorted understandings and 'information panics' sometimes ensued. The British community in India, for instance, typically isolated itself, losing the possibility for acquiring tactile cultural knowledge which could have guided more accurate intelligence.[97] Similarly to India, Singapore was a complex multi-ethnic state. One can argue that the British community were much better integrated than in India. Moreover, Special Branch recruited local Malay and Chinese as well as international Chinese and Indian officers. Even though colonial officials still applied racialist categorisations to understanding their subject populations, the front lines of British intelligence were much more in touch with the local situation than their forebears in colonial India.

Whilst Bayly emphasised the vulnerability of colonial intelligence, Martin Thomas' theory of 'intelligence states' (also applied by Edmund Clipson) alluded to the opportunities created by intelligence for ameliorating broader vulnerabilities. Intelligence was central to the colonial project because imperial powers recognised the limits of coercive power. Intelligence activities provided not only a system of information assessment, but also facilitated interaction between the coloniser and the colonised. Local informants, by aiding the security services to further their own agendas, participated in their own colonisation.[98] This conception is implicit of the ability of intelligence activities to contribute to the implementation as well as the formulation of policy: one of the key reasons why the Singapore intelligence milieu was seen as effective.

Moving away from a localised approach, there appears growing interest about regionalism in late-imperial British intelligence organisation. Specifically, Philip Murphy has assessed the significance of the Federal Intelligence and Security Bureau of the Central African Federation. This was a more executive regional authority than the coordinating machinery of the Commissioner General

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[97] C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 143, 165-166. Comparable ideas about the relationship between intelligence and colonial knowledge are expressed in: James Hevia, *The Imperial Security State: British Colonial Knowledge and Empire-Building in Asia (Cambridge: Cambridge* University Press, 2012).
[98] Thomas, Empires of Intelligence, pp. 2-3, 294-295; Edmund Clipson, '"For Purposes of Political Camouflage": Intelligence Gathering in Colonial Burma, 1933-35', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40(4) (2012), 643-667.

for Southeast Asia.[99] Nevertheless, many of the difficulties faced in the relationship between local, regional and national intelligence in Singapore were not unique to Southeast Asia but part of broader issues in providing intelligence and security for the federal approach to empire.[100] With more direct parallels to the Singapore situation, SIFE's sister agency Security Intelligence Middle East (SIME) – based initially in Cairo and later Cyprus – has been the focus of articles by Roger Arditti and Chikara Hashimoto. SIME was wound down in 1958 as Britain faced the reality of rapidly dwindling influence in the Middle East. The South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) commitment, intensity of the regional Cold War and threat from Indonesia ensured that SIFE remained a vital adjunct of the Commissioner General's establishment until the early 1960s.[101]

Regional organisation was not purely an intelligence structure. The Commissioner General's offices contained diplomatic, defence, colonial, economic, research and public relations sections as well as intelligence agencies. By focusing on intelligence, this thesis highlights the significance of this broader regional structure for understanding Britain's Cold War in the Far East. The regional level of Far Eastern policy has been the focus of very few previous studies.

Perhaps most notable in this regard is Karl Hack's 2001 book. Hack, primarily a historian of the Malayan Emergency, looked at British defence posture in relation to metropolitan, international and local influences. He suggested that Britain's regionalist policy showed continuity with pre-existing imperial aims, and that the Cold War only added greater emphasis to longer-term defence concerns. Overall, Hack emphasised Britain's limited engagement with the Cold War.

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[99] Philip Murphy, 'A Police State? The Nyasaland Emergency and Colonial Intelligence', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36(4) (2010), 765-780; Murphy, 'Intelligence and Decolonisation'; Murphy, 'Creating a Commonwealth Intelligence Culture'.

[100] The British concept of federation as a solution to problems of imperial defence or security can be dated back to the Canadian Confederation of 1867, and includes the abortive Central African Confederation, the much looser office of the Commissioner General for Southeast Asia, and the mixed success achieved in the creation of a federal Malaya in 1963. See: Ronald Hyam, 'The Primacy of Geopolitics: The Dynamics of British Imperial Policy, 1763-1963', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 27(2) (1999), 27-52 (p. 33).

[101] Roger Arditti, 'Security Intelligence in the Middle East (SIME): Joint Security Intelligence Operations in the Middle East, c. 1939-58', *Intelligence and National Security*, 31(3) (2016), 369-396; Chikara Hashimoto, 'Fighting the Cold War or Post-Colonialism? Britain in the Middle East from 1945 to 1958: Looking through the Records of the British Security Service', *International History Review*, 36(1) (2014), 19-44; Shaw, 'MI5 and the Cold War in South-East Asia', p. 813.

Although policy-makers wanted a buffer zone of non-communist states between the British territories of Malaya and Singapore and the communist states of North Vietnam and China, they were not prepared to back this up with hard commitments. Such an undertaking would have contradicted defence policies formulated on the basis of reducing and devolving defence responsibilities.[102] Hack's work is praiseworthy for its sustained focus on the regional level of defence and also for incorporating national policy. However, he can be criticised for paying little attention to the intelligence dimension. The BDCC(FE) was served by the JIC(FE), and as well as guiding defence policies, intelligence agencies were able to contribute to the execution of policy. Hack is correct in asserting that Britain was unwilling to entertain major overt commitments to the 'upper arc' of Southeast Asia. However, they instead used covert means such as intelligence training and propaganda interventions to play a proactive clandestine role in shoring up this buffer zone.

Other historians have attempted to cover British policy across Southeast Asia, including Peter Lowe and Nicholas Tarling.[103] In contrast to Hack's study, their works are essentially treatments of a series of local issues with reference to particular states, rather than offering analysis about region-wide trends. Both acknowledge the position of Commissioner General, but downplay its significance on providing a new approach to policy-making. Lowe notes that 'the appointments of Killearn [Foreign Office Special Commissioner] and MacDonald were significant in the sense of reinforcing awareness of the common problems of the region but there was no intention of ceding real power to a viceroy based in Singapore'.[104] Through the prism of intelligence, this assertion can be questioned. Certainly the metropole had no intention of ceding power to the Commissioner General's establishment. As Tilman Remme's study of Britain's pursuit of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia has shown, London came to prefer cooperation through inter-governmental arrangements rather than devolving

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[102] Karl Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia: Britain, Malaya and Singapore, 1941-1968 (*Richmond: Curzon, 2001), pp. 299-302
[103] Peter Lowe, *Contending with Nationalism and Communism: British Policy towards Southeast Asia, 1945-65* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Nicholas Tarling, *Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Cold War, 1945-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Nicholas Tarling, Britain, *Southeast Asia and the Impact of the Korean War* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005).
[104] Lowe, *Contending with Nationalism and Communism*, p. 5.

power to Singapore.[105] However, this did not prevent MacDonald and Scott from trying to pursue an independent (although usually complementary) policy, or from attempting to usurp policy-making functions from the local or national levels. Moreover, whilst the diplomatic and colonial elements of the Commissioner General's offices had no real power, the intelligence agencies attached to Phoenix Park – reinforced by their local and national links – did have power to enact a more assertive regionalist policy.

Some metropolitan officials held the view that 'the value of the Commissioner General's organisation depended entirely upon the personality of Malcolm MacDonald'.[106] Whilst MacDonald's unique personality and personal friendships with Asian leaders were a significant part of the value of the Commissioner General, the ability to conduct theatre-level intelligence operations was another.[107] As noted by Spencer Mawby with regard to the Caribbean (but equally applicable to Southeast Asia), the need to reach accommodation with moderate nationalists during the era of decolonisation created a more low-key approach to the Cold War, reliant on covert activities.[108]

In analysing this bureaucracy and the personalities within it, the thesis interacts with ideas from New Diplomatic History. New Diplomatic History is a holistic approach to the study of diplomacy which responds to social and cultural studies by shifting focus towards the processes rather than the results of diplomatic activity. Studies responding to this agenda have varyingly focused on gendered concepts of diplomacy, the conceptual links between modern and pre-modern diplomacy, diplomatic performance or ritual, and broader considerations of who we understand to be a 'diplomat'.[109] Whilst contributing to the tradition of intelligence history, the thesis also draws inspiration from these ideas. Most explicitly, later chapters consider the diplomatic potential of intelligence agencies.

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[105] Tilman Remme, *Britain and Regional Cooperation in South-East Asia, 1945-49* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 164.

[106] KV 4/426, Note of discussion between White and Kirkpatrick, 13 January 1955.

[107] On MacDonald's personality and diplomatic approach, see: Alexander Nicholas Shaw, 'A Diplomat and Collector: Malcolm MacDonald's Pursuit of Beauty during the Cold War and End of Empire', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 30(3) (2018), 511-527.

[108] Spencer Mawby, 'Mr. Smith Goes to Vienna: Britain's Cold War in the Caribbean, 1951-1954', *Cold War History*, 13(4) (2013), 541-561 (p. 560).

[109] The seminal contribution to this field is: John Watkins, 'Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 38(1) (2014), 1-14.

Building on the work done by Chikara Hashimoto with regard to intelligence diplomacy in the Middle East, the thesis thereby contributes to the agenda of New Diplomatic History by reframing the intelligence practitioner as a potential diplomat.[110] Moreover, just as New Diplomatic Historians seek to investigate the processes behind diplomatic results, the thesis aims to investigate the culture of intelligence in Singapore, its interaction with society (particularly in the work of Special Branch), and its relationships with its principal users.

As well as growing interest in the regional level, national intelligence networks are increasingly understood to have played an important role in colonial crises. In *Confronting the Colonies*, Cormac explored how the JIC approached colonial insurgencies. He argued that the Cold War provided a 'cognitive prism' through which the JIC viewed colonial crises, which could sometimes have damaging ramifications for accurate assessment. International explanations were favoured over purely internal ones and 'simplistically conflated imperial developments with Cold War developments'.[111] Although his study is metropolitan-focused, Cormac's analysis is equally applicable to the regional JICs. As this study explores, the JIC(FE) – and broader regional intelligence community – tended towards Cold War explanations. This did not always mean that they ignored local factors, but that these local factors were often seen as products of Cold War influences.

Also focusing on colonial flashpoints, Tony Craig instead considered the role of MI5 in specific crises. He suggested two models to explain their involvement. In counter-subversion scenarios, with relatively stable conditions, MI5 used pre-emptive tactics, helping to define and investigate potential threats. In this they were acting more as security consultants than directly-concerned actors. In contrast, during counterinsurgency scenarios, MI5 was drawn into closer relationships with the local intelligence community. For Craig, the nature of the operating environment determined the way MI5 responded. Although there is some utility in these models, there are also problems with them.[112] It is

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[110] Hashimoto, 'The Training of Secret Police'.

[111] Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies*, p. 51.

[112] Tony Craig, 'From Countersubversion to Counter-insurgency – Comparing MI5's Role in British Guiana, Aden and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Crisis', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 14(1) (2015), 38-53 (p. 39).

questionable whether there is such a clear distinction. The situation in Singapore was one of counter-subversion, albeit with a great deal of overlap with the counterinsurgency in Malaya. But MI5 oscillated between a hands-off approach, providing advice and reports to government whilst letting the local intelligence collectors get on with their tasks, and a more active role through planting officers within Special Branch. This had more to do with MI5's medium-term aims for building a post-colonial intelligence legacy, as well as a perennial problem in long-term intelligence collection, than the nature of the Singapore situation.

Furthermore, Craig's analysis is of less help in understanding the involvement of MI5 outside its traditional imperial remit. In October 1948, the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, adjudicated that SIS should withdraw its presence from post-colonial India. This precedent established the so-called 'Attlee Doctrine', by which the Empire and Commonwealth were seen as MI5's spheres of influence, and the rest of the world assigned to SIS.[113] A more functional division of labour evolved under the auspices of the Commissioner General's establishment in Singapore. As the security intelligence authority, SIFE was primarily responsible for liaison with the SEATO powers and providing security training to foreign intelligence services. This involved MI5 outside the imperial sphere, provoking opportunities for more meaningful collaboration with SIS than was present in other theatres.

This thesis also contributes to a body of studies looking specifically at the role of intelligence in Cold War conflicts and crises in Southeast Asia. In addition to studies of Britain's involvement in clandestine affairs, recent works have highlighted the significance of other powers, particularly the French regime in Indochina and Dutch authorities in Indonesia. Meanwhile, other historians have elucidated upon the part played by non-colonial powers including Canada and Australia. Australia played an important role in regional affairs through membership of SEATO and collaborated closely with Britain in SEATO intelligence forums.[114]

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[113] Lomas, Intelligence, *Security and the Attlee Governments*, pp. 225-227.

[114] Christopher Goscha, 'Intelligence in a Time of Decolonisation: The Case of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at War (1945-1950)', *Intelligence and National Security*, 22(1) (2007), 100-138; Bart Luttikhuis, 'Creating Distrust through Intelligence Work: Psychological Terror and the

From a British perspective, the role of MI5 and SIFE was discussed by Calder Walton's *Empire of Secrets*.[115] This populist narrative lacked a central thesis and broadly repeated other accounts of intelligence in Malaya. Walton fell into the trap of seeing SIFE largely through the prism of the Malayan Emergency, whereas SIFE's responsibilities were more concerned with the region as whole. Fewer historians have chosen to look at the role of SIS(FE) than MI5. Philip Davies' 1999 article remains the only focused study of the topic.[116] However, his article is largely confined to theoretical models and exploring the position of the Far East Controller within the overall SIS hierarchy. The lack of archival sources prevents a deeper study into the work of SIS(FE).[117] Indeed, the only operational details discovered by the current author relate to a failed propaganda adventure, Operation Debenture. Debenture was also discussed by Thomas Maguire, whose thesis on intelligence and propaganda explored some of the relationships between RIO, SIS and SIFE in pursuing counter-subversion in Southeast Asia.[118] Maguire's thesis demonstrated a rigorous application of British and American sources in examining the policies pursued by both powers. The principal differences between his work and the current study are threefold. Firstly, this study takes security intelligence as its keystone, whereas Maguire focused on propaganda intelligence. Secondly, the current thesis is more concerned with intelligence organisation, methods and analysis, whereas Maguire was more interested in the practical outputs of the intelligence process through propaganda. Finally, Maguire's study was not an investigation into the British intelligence milieu based in Singapore. Instead it was an analysis of British and American attempts to affect counter-subversion.

Dutch Security Services in Indonesia, 1945-1949', *War in History*, 25(2) (2018), 151-171; Miriam Matejova and Don Munton, 'Western Intelligence Cooperation on Vietnam in the Early Cold War Era', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 15(2) (2016), 139-155; David McKnight, 'Western Intelligence and SEATO's War on Subversion, 1956-63', *Intelligence and National Security*, 20(2) (2005), 288-303.

[115] Walton, *Empire of Secrets*, particularly pp. 163-209.

[116] Philip H. J. Davies, 'The SIS Singapore Station and the Role of the Far Eastern Controller: Secret Intelligence Structure and Process in Post-War Colonial Administration', *Intelligence and National Security*, 14(4) (1999), 105-129.

[117] More details are apparent in Nikita Wolf's research into SIS observations on North Vietnam from the British consulate in Hanoi: Nikita Wolf, '"This Secret Town": British Intelligence, the Special Relationship and the Vietnam War', *International History Review*, 39(2) (2017), 338-367.

[118] Maguire, 'British and American Intelligence and Anti-Communist Propaganda', pp. 175-176.

In contrast to a dearth of information on agencies such as the JIC(FE) and SIFE in published histories, another unpublished thesis by Roger Arditti provided greater insight into their interaction with the Malayan Emergency. Indeed, the Malayan Emergency of 1948-60 has attracted more interest from intelligence scholarship than any other aspect of British intelligence in the Far East.[119] Whilst most of this literature focuses on the purely local intelligence machinery, Arditti considered how the JIC(FE), SIFE and JAPIC(FE) interacted with local intelligence collectors. Nevertheless, his conclusions were greatly different from those expounded by this thesis. Arditti argued that the JIC(FE) and SIFE meddled with a reasonably well-performing local intelligence machine, the Malayan Security Service (MSS) and hindered intelligence efforts in combatting the insurgency. He posited that service intelligence mechanisms were far superior to civilian ones in adapting to the local environment and encouraging joint operations. However, whilst Arditti acknowledged that SIFE's regional remit 'was bisected by local and metropolitan responsibilities', his scope did not allow for investigating their activities at the regional or national level.[120]

Looking beyond Malaya, a clear trend developed, showing the reduction in status and relevance of service intelligence organisations over time. Meanwhile, SIFE became increasingly central to the work of the Commissioner General. Whilst most of the literature about Malaya agrees that the Special Branch created in 1948 took at least 2-3 years and possibly longer to become a really effective intelligence producer, the performance of its fraternal organisation in Singapore remains a 'missing dimension'. Therefore, acknowledging the corpus of existing

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[119] As well as chapters from the books by Walton and Cormac which deal with the metropolitan level, more localised studies of Malayan intelligence include: Karl Hack, 'British Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in the Era of Decolonisation: The Example of Malaya', *Intelligence and National Security*, 14(2) (1999), 124-155; Roger Arditti, 'The View from Above: How the Royal Air Force Provided a Strategic Vision for Operational Intelligence in the Malayan Emergency', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 26(5) (2015), 764-789; Roger Arditti and Philip H. J. Davies, 'Rethinking the Rise and Fall of the Malayan Security Service, 1946-48', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 43(2) (2015), 292-316; Huw Bennett, '"A Very Salutary Effect": The Counter-Terror Strategy in the Early Malayan Emergency, June 1948 to December 1949', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32(3) (2009), 415-444; Georgina Sinclair, '"The Sharp End of the Intelligence Machine": The Rise of the Malayan Police Special Branch 1948-1955', *Intelligence and National Security*, 26(4) (2011), 460-477; Simon Smith, 'General Templer and Counter-Insurgency in Malaya: Hearts and Minds, Intelligence and Propaganda', Intelligence and National Security, 16(3) (2001), 60-78; Brian Stewart, 'Winning in Malaya: An Intelligence Success Story', *Intelligence and National Security*, 14(4) (1999), 267-283; Leon Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police, 1945-60: The Role of the Special Branch in the Malayan Emergency* (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2008)

[120] Arditti, 'Our Achilles Heel', p. 130.

work on British intelligence in Malaya, this thesis does not propose to directly add to this. Instead, it provides a countervailing view which combines the regional and national bigger picture with a localised focus on developments within Singapore itself. This provides not only an original insight into the Malayan and Singaporean Emergency, but also challenges previous assertions about Britain's hands-off policy in Southeast Asia, and demonstrates the importance of the three-tier intelligence structure in maintaining Britain's great power ambitions.

Overview

The core themes of this thesis are the relationship between local, regional and national intelligence; the importance of intelligence in driving Singapore's post-war transitions; and the position of Singapore as a 'unique window' or 'slough of despond'. In order to understand the significance of these themes, the thesis looks at three main areas of analysis: intelligence organisation, intelligence culture and intelligence outcomes.

With regard to organisation, status and hierarchy, this thesis looks at the interplay between the three levels of intelligence. This is an issue with significance beyond Singapore, as similar systems were adopted in late-imperial Africa and the Middle East. Also, within each level, the thesis considers how the organisation of intelligence systems can indicate the relative status of activities or agencies. Specifically, it investigates why security intelligence attained a position of significance.

To fully understand British intelligence in Singapore, we must move beyond organisation and consider the workings or operational culture of intelligence. In so doing, the thesis considers whether a unified intelligence culture developed. It is apparent that it did not. Although security intelligence was at the heart of both a regional-national and a local intelligence community, the former consistently sought to enhance its own status by downplaying the intelligence culture of the latter. With regard to intelligence assessment, the thesis looks at how far analysis was dominated by Cold War paradigms. From the mid-1940s, intelligence analysts consistently applied Cold War logic to the situation in

Singapore and Southeast Asia more broadly. However, this was not always insensitive to local complexities.

Finally, in seeking to understand the impact and influence of British intelligence in Singapore, we must evaluate the influence of intelligence upon policy-makers. This is far from straightforward, as available policy documents or discussions rarely make direct reference to intelligence material. Intelligence officials briefed decision-makers, and decision-makers then created policy which often accorded with the analysis of their intelligence advisors. Yet it is difficult to determine how far this was directly the result of intelligence dissemination, or whether it was a coincidence of views. Other ways of thinking about the impact of intelligence are to interrogate the significance of intelligence activities as a means of engaging with the Cold War in Southeast Asia, and how these clandestine endeavours contributed to achieving national goals. In this regard, both the local and regional-national intelligence communities were of considerable importance in supporting overt policy. This explains why the 'slough of despond' view failed to undermine support for the retention of a large and diverse intelligence milieu in Singapore. Moreover, impact can also be understood in bureaucratic as well as organisational terms. Some intelligence agencies thrived and appeared to win the confidence of their users, whereas others were assigned to the scrapheap of intelligence history. Even if it is not always possible to trace the impact of intelligence reportage, the overall impact of an intelligence agency (or broader community) can be evaluated through the status and influence that agency developed.

To examine these issues, the thesis employs a range of sources. Most numerous are the official state papers of the UK National Archives. As well as the records produced by government departments at the receiving end of intelligence, these include a growing corpus of data directly produced by intelligence agencies. Such records are far from perfect, and it can be dangerous to adopt an overly deterministic attitude. Just because one agency recommended something, it did not automatically become policy. Moreover, the nature of the British intelligence system, geared towards departmentalism rather than centralisation, could produce competing voices. The British intelligence architecture was greatly infused with

'Whitehall's genetic code'.[121] However, for any given period of time, only a fraction of these voices are represented in the archives.

Nevertheless, there is a significant quantity of sources regarding the organisation and activities of British intelligence in Singapore. One of the most valuable are the MI5 'KV' series in the UK National Archives. These include records created by its Singapore offshoot, SIFE. However, the abrupt termination of these records in 1956 has created confusion. A recent journal article erroneously suggested that SIFE was wound down in 1956.[122] SIFE actually continued to operate 1963, but the scanty files from the post-1956 period are to be found in the records of other departments. The 'KV' files shed light on the relationship between SIFE and MI5 Head Office, the position of SIFE within the Commissioner General's establishment, and the internal organisation of SIFE. Conversely, they are weak on details of what SIFE officers actually did. Much information concerning the operation of a joint sub-section with SIS(FE) is redacted. Although containing some interesting internal reviews, they do not contain much evidence of the products SIFE was disseminating to its consumers. Finished SIFE reports abound in the Colonial Office records for the period of 1948-50, but dry up thereafter. As an alternative source of MI5 insider information, the diaries of its Deputy Director-General, Guy Liddell, contain a number of personal insights into SIFE-SIS relations, the direction of SIFE efforts, and the dissemination of intelligence through the JIC. Comparable problems of limited chronology abound with many of the other agencies discussed. However, taking a bigger view of the Singapore intelligence community enables the precise histories of different agencies to be co-opted at different times, enabling a more substantive discussion than is possible for any single agency.

The release in 2012-13 of the Migrated Archives (the 'FCO 141' series at the National Archives) made this thesis possible. The intelligence records from Singapore are a previously untapped trove of information about the activities of various agencies. They are, of course, far from perfect. Although containing a number of folders relevant to regional agencies such as the JIC(FE), these are chronologically sporadic and concentrated upon the earlier years of this thesis.

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[121] Davies, *The Authorised History of British Defence Economic Intelligence*, p. 143.
[122] Arditti and Davies, 'Rethinking the Rise and Fall of the Malayan Security Service', p. 311.

The greatest strength of the Migrated Archives lies in reports produced by local intelligence bodies.

By knitting together various different reports produced by Special Branch and a succession of local intelligence committees, an unbroken run of intelligence reports can be created from 'FCO 141' records. These almost exclusively contained disseminated reports produced for consumer departments. They summarised the state of intelligence at the time, and triumphantly paraded Special Branch successes in obtaining important intelligence or taking effective action against the communists. They rarely gave details about the methods used by Special Branch to gain this information, except when such methods are almost accidental. As such, these records are best supplemented with the digitised oral histories of Special Branch officers held by the National Archives of Singapore. These provide valuable insight into the operational culture and methods of Special Branch, but little about the assessments process or impact of their activities. Oral histories form a useful counterpoint to the 'FCO 141' local intelligence sources, as the weaknesses of the one are the strengths of the other. Nevertheless, these oral histories can have reliability issues due to the time lapse between the events described and the actual recording. In this thesis, they have therefore been used with caution to illustrate the personal reflections of former intelligence officers about the intelligence culture they operated in, rather than as evidence of specific operations.

Similar problems and opportunities can be found in the memoirs consulted for this thesis. Some of the most interesting are the memoirs of a Singaporean communist leader;[123] a Japanese diplomat and spy who collaborated with British intelligence immediately after the Second World War;[124] and Australian or American intelligence officers who frequently liaised with the British.[125] As well as these memoirs, digitised intelligence files from Australia and the United States have been consulted for an allied perspective upon British intelligence in Southeast Asia.

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[123] Fong Chong Pik, *Memoirs of a Malayan Communist Revolutionary* (Singapore: SIRD, 2008).
[124] Mamoru Shinozaki, *Syonan: My Story* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2011).
[125] Mathams, *Sub Rosa*; Smith, *Portrait of a Cold Warrior*; Smith, *The Unknown CIA*.

In addition to state records, oral histories and memoirs, this thesis incorporates the private papers of both intelligence producers and users. These frequently contain official documentation as well as more personal reflections. The admittedly few private papers of John Dalley (Director of the Malayan Security Service, 1946-48) include various reports pertinent to the organisation of his agency, whilst an adjacent series in Oxford's Bodleian Library comprises its finished reports. The papers of Singapore-based colonial officials such as H. Ralph Hone (Oxford) and W. L. Blythe (SOAS) also give insight into the early organisation of local intelligence. The most useful personal repository is that of Commissioner General Malcolm MacDonald. The extensive Malcolm MacDonald papers held by Durham University contain reams of personal letters, unpublished book manuscripts, and occasional insights into the relationship between MacDonald and the intelligence community. MacDonald was a colourful and personable character and, as the primary authority to whom regional intelligence was responsible, a key figure in this thesis.

Nevertheless, although it is possible to reconstruct the history of the British intelligence milieu in Singapore, we must remember that this is an imperfect reconstruction. As aforementioned, at the regional-national level, there are far more organisational records available than those relating to operational or analytical processes of intelligence. To refer to the intelligence cycle, it is far harder to draw conclusions about intelligence collection than direction. The records available strongly indicate that intelligence managers and users were consistently dissatisfied with intelligence collection during this period (but generally supportive of the agencies charged with collecting it). However, without access to more of the reports they were receiving (particularly post-1950), it is difficult to interrogate the validity of their views.

In the international dimension, very few records have been declassified to shed light on Britain's intelligence liaison and intelligence diplomacy. Intelligence liaison can be defined as the development of relationships between intelligence agencies for purposes of sharing information or otherwise benefitting the intelligence agencies directly. Intelligence diplomacy refers to the actions of intelligence agencies in building relationships to fulfil broader political goals. From the available records – particularly the comments of intelligence managers

in the JIC system and diary entries of Guy Liddell – it would appear that intelligence liaison was less effective than intelligence diplomacy.

Few records are therefore available which give operational detail about intelligence collection, intelligence sharing or processes of covert action. Equally, from 1950 onwards, it becomes more difficult to see what sort of processed intelligence was reaching consumers. This has implications for evaluating the impact of intelligence. However, this obstacle is not insurmountable. The strengths of the available sources lie in details regarding the relationships between intelligence agencies and the way they were managed. Consequently, we can trace impact in bureaucratic if not in operational terms. In other words, intelligence agencies may not have enjoyed success in their operational activities, or we may not be able to judge if they were successful. Instead, it is possible to trace their bureaucratic success: which agencies thrived and why their principal users supported them. That agencies such as SIFE were able to do this despite indications that they were less operationally effective is testament to the overall status of intelligence within Whitehall (and its tropical offshoot in Singapore) during the Cold War.

Although there is a much greater quantity of intelligence summaries available for the local intelligence picture than the regional-national level, interpreting the Singapore Special Branch creates its own problems. The sources of the Migrated Archives are strongest with regard to processed intelligence reports distributed by Special Branch. Far less is said about the legal context in which Special Branch operated. In analysing the allegations of physical torture discussed in chapter seven, we are forced to rely upon records created by Special Branch themselves and declassified by the British state. The fact that these records seem to vindicate Special Branch is perhaps unsurprising. This does not, however, mean that they are not correct (in this specific instance). Consequently, the thesis does not intend to intervene in debates surrounding the (mis)use of force in counterinsurgency or colonial 'rebellions' because it would be dangerous to draw blanket conclusions based on such scanty evidence.

The thesis proceeds in three chronological sections. Part one deals with the period from the end of the British Military Administration in April 1946 until the

Singapore riots of December 1950. The three chapters within this section explore how intelligence communities were constructed and then adapted to the changing environment during the transition from a 'post-war' to a 'Cold War' world.

Chapter two shows how priorities and expectations were determined by national actors expecting the core work of the new intelligence system to be strategic. The system created from 1946 was a Second World War construct. However, the emergence of insurgency and subversion as the key threats to British interests resulted in a re-evaluation of the influence and status of different activities. Chapter three moves beyond organisation to consider the content of intelligence assessments and their impact upon policy-makers' perceptions of a Cold War. It considers the problems in intelligence production which potentially made these assessments unreliable, and the influence of Cold War paradigms and the anti-communist agenda of Malcolm MacDonald. The fourth chapter focuses on the implications of the Malayan Emergency for local security in Singapore. This chapter shows how the Singapore Special Branch became an effective instrument of counter-terrorism and examines the role of regional and national networks in contributing to the local intelligence machine.

Part two considers a period of both consolidation and change beginning with Malcolm MacDonald's 'Cold War' conference in August 1950 and ending with his replacement by Robert Scott in 1955. Whilst the British intelligence machine sought to build upon its strengths and devise new approaches to ameliorate its weaknesses, the Cold War was expanding and changing. The intervention of communist China in the Korean War brought different intelligence agencies to prominence. Meanwhile, the creation of SEATO and developments in Vietnam meant that Britain was increasingly involved in intelligence coordination at the international level.

Chapter five embodies these changes by examining how the regional intelligence community expanded its remit and influence. This chapter expands upon the growing synergy between MI5 and SIS, the increasing prominence of propaganda and covert action, and the use of intelligence diplomacy as a solution to Cold War concerns. This chapter also considers how Britain responded to the rise of communist China. Meanwhile, chapter six returns to the situation within

the island of Singapore. As Special Branch became a victim of its own success, having dealt a decisive blow to the MCP but sacrificed inside sources, the three levels of intelligence became increasingly interpenetrated. This revised intelligence machine continued to devote its efforts to improving security within Singapore.

The final part, and seventh chapter, deals with the road to Singapore's landmark elections in 1959. This chapter evaluates how Britain responded to increasing uncertainty regarding the future of its intelligence base in Singapore, and how political considerations had an increasing impact upon the nature of intelligence operations. It also assesses the impact of attempts to 'Malayanise' the local intelligence machine, and the significance of intelligence agencies in how policy-makers came to terms with the rising power of the PAP.

Overall, the thesis concludes that the two intelligence communities were distinguished by different organisational models, working practices and priorities. The local intelligence community demonstrated a moderately successful capacity for intelligence production. Conversely, the major recurring weakness of the regional-national community was an inability to improve the collection of raw intelligence outside Singapore. Nonetheless, all levels of intelligence had a significant impact upon Britain's pursuit of its foreign policy objectives. In the first instance, intelligence communities reinforced a Cold War awareness within their consumer departments and provided assessments regarding the nature and level of threat. Yet intelligence communities were more than just passive, reporting bodies. The regional-national community offered opportunities to covertly implement Cold War policies through helping to cement alliances, providing a mechanism for building up a buffer zone in the 'northern tier' of Southeast Asia via propaganda, covert action and security assistance, and facilitating the continuation of British influence despite dwindling overt resources. This is one of the prime reasons why the regional-national intelligence community continued to be regarded as a 'unique window' upon the intelligence challenges of Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, the local intelligence community guided police action and shaped opinions to make sure that Singapore was safe for decolonisation.

Part 1

From post-war to Cold War, 1946-1950

2. Creating a post-war intelligence machine

The aftermath of the Second World War witnessed an important milestone in the political development of Malaya and Singapore. Whilst many expected a return to pre-war colonial normality, Britain did not revert to business as usual. Instead, during the period of the British Military Administration from September 1945-April 1946, the Colonial Office prepared for a radical reorganisation of its possessions in Southeast Asia. A centralised Malayan Union and separate Singapore were created against the warnings of experienced colonial officials. The Malayan Union failed to win popular support, and was replaced with the Federation of Malaya in February 1948. Singapore remained a separate crown colony. However, newly arrived officials including Malcolm MacDonald foresaw that the future of these nations lay in independence as part of a single federal state. Such an approach mirrored the pan-Malayan outlook of MacDonald's first office as Governor General (1946-48). With such a preoccupation on restructuring mainland Malaya, the British reoccupied with fewer plans for developing the city-colony.[1]

The administration's immediate concern was the restoration of law and order. Doing so was rendered problematic by reliance on friendly local elites who had proved equally amenable to the Japanese. Moreover, British colonial officials treated lawlessness and corruption as endemic to Singapore due to the presence of both Chinese and Malay secret societies.[2] Meanwhile, the communists were hailed as heroes for their role in resisting the Japanese occupation. Their leader Chin Peng received the OBE. The Supreme Allied Commander for Southeast Asia, Louis Mountbatten, recognised the MCP as a legal entity, arguably undoing the counter-subversion efforts of Special Branch in the 1930s and the Japanese Kempeitai in the 1940s. As well as maintaining legal premises on Queen Street in Singapore's administrative centre, the Party set up an underground Singapore Town Committee. The latter operated through front organisations including the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU) and its local subsidiary, the Singapore Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU). The communists quickly began to capitalise on socioeconomic discontent and organise strikes which increasingly

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[1] Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, pp. 225-228.
[2] René Onraet, *Singapore: A Police Background* (London: Dorothy Crisp, 1946), p. 105.

pushed the British authorities towards a more confrontational attitude.[3] In June 1947, Malcolm MacDonald told his intelligence advisors that:

> The field of Singapore was very fruitful for them [the communists]. He pointed out that Singapore had a large Asiatic population who were very gullible and who could be easily played upon in regard to the anti-European complex, anti-Imperialism complex, &c. [sic] in all sorts of ways.[4]

Even before the outbreak of violence in Malaya in June 1948, colonial officials were therefore expressing concern about potential communist subversion. In this particular extract, the focus is on communism as a threat to imperial security, but this was increasingly framed with reference to the international Cold War.

MacDonald's comment also indicates how imperialist racial preconceptions influenced the way that Britain conceptualised Singapore. In 1946, a former Inspector-General of Police noted how:

> For a long time to come, the many different peoples of this as yet undeveloped country will be better served by British officers brought up in and interested in the country than by idealists or theorists interested in their ideals or theories; or even by better class men of their own race who are as yet too close to and too attracted by the old nepotic [sic] tradition of native rule.[5]

In this comment, the imperialist world-view is clear, as is the conceptual line drawn between ideologues (i.e. communists) and anti-colonial nationalists.

Against this background of colonial restructuring and revived concerns about communism and imperial security, Britain created a new intelligence network for Singapore and the Far East. This chapter examines how the shaping of the post-war intelligence community. At both the local and regional levels, there was a clear preference for non-executive, theatre-wide and joint agencies. The core intelligence concerns which dominated this system were strategic, ensuring that service intelligence directorates enjoyed high status. However, the eruption of insurgencies across the region shifted concerns towards security and

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[3] Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, pp. 232-233.
[4] Bodleian Library, Mss Ind Ocn s. 254, Papers of John Douglas Dalley, Minutes of Governor General's special conference, 26 June 1947.
[5] Onraet, *Singapore*, p. 15.

foreign intelligence. As counter-subversion became the key policy goal in the Cold War (both within Singapore and across the region), civilian security services such as SIFE and the Singapore Special Branch began dominating the intelligence agenda. The outbreak of the Malayan Emergency proved to be a catalyst for important changes in the shape and status of the British intelligence apparatus in Singapore.

Rebuilding local intelligence

The origins of Singapore's local intelligence community can be traced back to the First World War. An organised communist movement existed in Singapore from 1925. The MCP in its recognisable form was created only in 1930. However, the main catalyst in the creation of a police intelligence branch was not the communist threat but the 1915 Indian Army mutiny in Singapore. It was by no accident that the intelligence machinery continued to rely upon old India policemen well into the 1940s. In 1918, following advice from the Delhi Intelligence Bureau, the Singapore police set up both a Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and an Intelligence Department. This latter organisation was a counter-espionage and counter-subversion agency which soon became known as the Special Branch.[6]

By the 1930s, the preoccupation with revolutionary Indian nationalism (only claiming to represent a small minority of Singapore's population) was replaced by both communist subversion and Japanese espionage. By 1935, Special Branch had penetrated the MCP at the highest levels. Nigel Morris, a future Director of Special Branch, was appointed the head of the Anti-Communist Section in 1935. Morris believed that the key to their success was recruiting local Chinese detectives. Some of these had even been members of the MCP before defecting, and thus had the knowledge and contacts needed to run double agents within the communist party.[7]

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[6] Ban Kah Choon, *Absent History*, pp. 66-74.
[7] NAS 001745, Interview with Nigel Morris, reel 2.

Their most famous success was in running Lai Tek as a penetration agent. Lai Tek had previously worked for French colonial intelligence in Indochina, and was passed to Singapore in 1934. From 1939-47, the British succeeded in planting him as the Secretary-General of the MCP by using Special Branch intelligence to pick off his rivals.[8] With a British agent as head of the MCP, the communist movement was little threat in this period.

Special Branch also turned its attention to Japanese espionage in the later 1930s. In 1937, another future Director, Alan Blades, set up a Security Sub-Branch responsible for checking the 3000 Japanese citizens residing in Singapore at that time. In 1940, Blades arrested Mamoru Shinozaki, a diplomatic clerk believed by Special Branch to be a naval intelligence officer. According to Special Branch, Shinozaki had been creating a spy ring in Singapore unaware that his every move was being watched over a two year operation.[9] The relationship between Blades and Shinozaki played a crucial role in the post-war reconstruction of an effective local intelligence machine.

In February 1942, Singapore surrendered to the Japanese and the senior Special Branch staff evacuated the island. Following victory over Japan, Singapore was governed by the British Military Administration from September 1945-March 1946. During this time, there were two main local intelligence agencies, both concerned solely with security intelligence. On the military side, Field Security was commanded by Major Isaac. Their responsibilities included the administration of Japanese prisoners prior to repatriation. These included Japanese intelligence officers of the Kempeitai (the Japanese 'Gestapo'). Meanwhile, a civilian Malayan Security was established in September 1945 to reemploy former Special Branch officers in a security role. Briefly headed by a Major J. C. Barry, from November 1945 it was commanded by Alan Blades.[10] During this period, these temporary security intelligence organs proved effective in resurrecting a working intelligence machine. They began moving towards a policy of

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[8] Leon Comber, '"Traitor of all Traitors" – Secret Agent Extraordinaire: Lai Teck, Secretary General, Communist Party of Malaya (1939-1947)', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 83(2) (2010), 1-25.

[9] NAS 000150, Interview with Ahmad Khan, reel 1.

[10] Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police,* p. 31.

confrontation with communism at a time when the colonial authorities were preoccupied with political concerns.

The Japanese prisoners in the custody of Field Security included pre-war 'spy' and wartime civil administrator Mamoru Shinozaki. Shinozaki was pleasantly surprised to find that British intelligence was aware of his wartime record – he had saved many Singaporean Chinese families from persecution and death – and Blades greeted him 'like a long-lost friend'. From 1945-47 Shinozaki served as an interpreter for Field Security, where he was involved in translating the oral testimony of Kempeitai counter-intelligence officers. This provided important information on the position of the MCP at the end of the war.[11] Japanese intelligence officers proved only too pleased to cooperate with their former enemies. According to their British minders, this was because they hated the communists even more than they hated British imperialists.[12]

Although a few pre-war Special Branch records were successfully evacuated to India in 1942, most of their secret records were destroyed. Field Security interrogations of Kempeitai officers therefore proved a vital stopgap in rebuilding a security intelligence archive. In addition, immediate security efforts focused on re-establishing contact with former agents such as Lai Tek.[13]

As early as January 1946, Alan Blades wrote to the Supreme Allied Commander, Lord Mountbatten, to warn of the communist threat. During the war, the MCP had been uneasy allies, operating guerrilla forces under the direction of Force 136 of the British Special Operations Executive (SOE). But within a few months of victory, old tensions had resurfaced and the alliance collapsed. Blades warned that 'the communist party has had enough rope. If it is not pulled up with a jerk very soon there may be very serious consequences'. His advice fell on deaf ears. The Military Administration suffered from a tendency towards debate and consultation rather than taking decisive action.[14] For an interim administration

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[11] Shinozaki, *Syonan,* pp. 144-146.
[12] NAS 001745, Interview with Nigel Morris, reel 5.
[13] Bodleian Library, Mss Ind Ocn s. 271, Papers of H. Ralph Hone, Report on the British Military Administration of Malaya, p. 67, 87-89; CO 537/4814, SIFE report, 'Communism in Hong Kong', 2 February 1949.
[14] Bodleian Library, Mss Ind Ocn s. 262, Papers of Harold Fairburn, Blades to Mountbatten, 29 January 1946.

worried about the repercussions of the Whitehall decision to impose a new form of colonial rule, this was hardly surprising.

Blades was not alone in identifying the MCP as the principal threat to colonial security. Chinese Affairs advisor Victor Purcell noted that:

> The problem, however, is to keep the subversive activities of the Communist Party in check and at the same time not to interfere with legitimate association and expression of opinion… What we are confronted with at present is the threat of small but resolute attempts to terrorise the entire community with the undermining of the administration as their sole end.[15]

The British were not willing to turn Malaya into a police state, but some voices were clearly aware of the communist menace on the horizon. This anti-communist concern was framed solely in terms of the viability of colonial rule and emphasised the local agency of the MCP. This is not the same as the Cold War narratives which started to emerge from 1947.

The end of military rule and the beginning of the new civil administration in spring 1946 necessitated the creation of new intelligence bodies. Despite the change in colonial administration in favour of two separate colonies, a new Malayan Security Service (MSS) was created which was more expansive than the temporary organisation commanded by Blades.[16] This was pan-Malayan: encompassing both the colonies of the Malayan Union (which became the Federation of Malaya in 1948) and Singapore. In other words, the new MSS created in April 1946 occupied a poorly defined position somewhere between the local and regional levels and conflicted with the reality of colonial separation.

The director of the new organisation was Colonel John Dalley. Colonel Dalley was an experienced police officer and guerrilla organiser from the early stages of the war, but not a career intelligence officer. His pan-Malayan headquarters was in Singapore 'since Singapore is the centre for all Chinese subversive activities, which will always constitute the main security danger'.[17]

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[15] Bodleian Library, Mss Ind Ocn s. 116, Papers of W. L. Blythe, Report on Chinese Affairs by Victor Purcell (Principal Advisor, Chinese Affairs), 18 February 1946.

[16] A previous incarnation had existed from 1939, but the post-1946 MSS was very much a 'new' structure.

[17] FCO 141/14360, Minutes of a meeting between Malayan Police and SIFE, 2 September 1946.

Just like the intelligence outfits of the Military Administration, MSS was keenly aware that communism amongst the Chinese population would be the most serious threat to colonial security.

The existence of MSS as a security intelligence collation centre provided the kernel of rivalry with MI5. This was complicated by instructions to the MI5 representative in the Malayan Union, who was mandated not just to collate but also to 'collect security intelligence by all practicable means'.[18] MSS officer L. F. Knight viewed MI5's penetration into local intelligence collection with much consternation, writing that 'a first reading… gave me the impression of a sort of Gestapo organisation'. This first clash was defused through an agreement that MI5 officers would not run agents within Malaya and Singapore without MSS' knowledge.[19]

MSS had no executive powers to arrest or detain, and was therefore reliant on cooperation with the police to act upon its intelligence. This was not, however, forthcoming and Dalley felt isolated from 'the bigger framework of Empire security'.[20] Unlike the pre-war Special Branch, MSS was not part of the police and not integrated into the Colonial Office. Nor was it affiliated with the regional or national intelligence hierarchy. Temporarily a full-time observer, from late 1947 Dalley was removed from the membership of the JIC(FE), despite strong objections from Malcolm MacDonald. The committee's chairman explained that Dalley could still be invited to any relevant discussions, but because the JIC(FE) had a regional outlook, the director of a local intelligence service could not be a standing member. Whilst it could be debated whether MSS had more of a micro-regional remit, a second objection raised by the JIC(FE) to Dalley's continued presence was more decisive. The committee was mainly concerned with strategic questions and intelligence from foreign territories. The proper reporting agency for Dalley's intelligence was the colonial governments in question, and not the JIC, which fed into the national intelligence effort.[21]

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[18] FCO 141/14360, Directive for DSO Malayan Union, 1 August 1946.
[19] FCO 141/14360, Memorandum by L. F. Knight, 'Commentary on Instructions to DSO Malayan Union', 27 August 1946.
[20] FCO 141/17012, Memorandum by Dalley, 'Staffing MSS', 21 March 1947.
[21] FCO 141/15432, Minutes of a meeting held in Singapore, 28-29 November 1947.

The resuscitation of local security intelligence was thus a problematic process. On the one hand, MSS won the confidence of Governor General Malcolm MacDonald. But its nebulous foundations and lack of integration at any level of the intelligence hierarchy left it fundamentally vulnerable. Although security intelligence was paramount at the local level, both the police and MI5 felt they could do a better job than MSS. Most of the successes enjoyed by MSS from 1946-48 were the result of prior operations such as the pre-war recruitment of double agent Lai Tek. This was particularly apparent in Singapore, where MSS inherited a solid track record of achievement, as well as experienced officers such as Nigel Morris and Alan Blades. In contrast, the MSS Malayan branch struggled to achieve any meaningful successes.[22]

The concept of regional intelligence

The decision to create a 'regional' level of intelligence was a product of the specific circumstances of the time. According to a SIFE report of 1947, prior to the Second World War, intelligence production and evaluation were conducted on a compartmentalised local level. The surprise of the Japanese invasion of Malaya discredited this approach.[23] In addition, the war saw increasing attention to coordinated and joint intelligence endeavours, or – to put it another way – intelligence by committee. These wartime 'lessons' inspired a network of regional agencies created from 1946-49 along with their sometimes confusing acronyms. To paraphrase George Orwell, 'it looked at first sight as though [Singapore] were suffering from a plague of initials'.[24]

This new intelligence system contained elements of innovation as well as throwbacks and reactions to wartime 'lessons'. SIFE's dismissal of the previous intelligence regime as overly compartmentalised is a questionable interpretation of history. Moreover, the disparity between the local and regional intelligence

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[22] NAS 001745, Interview with Nigel Morris, reel 5; Bodleian Library, Mss Ind Ocn s. 254, Papers of John Douglas Dalley, Minute by Dalley, 1 July 1948.

[23] KV 4/422, SIFE Report, 'Assessment of the Value of SIFE and DSO Positions in the Far East', c. December 1947.

[24] Orwell was referring to Spain: George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 197.

communities which was present from 1946-48 would appear to suggest that this 'lesson' was not learned.

Before 1941, the British intelligence system in the Far East was primarily an imperial security service. However, successes in dealing with subversive threats such as the MCP in Malaya and Singapore contributed to an atmosphere of complacency in which counter-espionage and strategic foreign intelligence suffered. As well as separate imperial security services, a broader, theatre-level intelligence bureaucracy emerged during the 1930s. Initially based in Hong Kong, the three armed services pooled resources into a Far Eastern Combined Bureau (FECB). The level of cooperation between different intelligence organisations was reasonably good, but the individual sources of intelligence upon which they relied were poor. This observation also consistently describes the post-war period.[25]

In August 1939, defence planners reconciled themselves to the realisation that Hong Kong was indefensible against a large-scale attack. The FECB moved to the Singapore naval base (which had been completed in 1938) and a subsidiary Far East Security Service was formed to pool security information. This move was a landmark moment in Singapore's development as an intelligence centre. The centre of gravity in Britain's Far Eastern Empire was gradually shifting from Hong Kong to Singapore.[26] Historians have disagreed over the extent to which this embryonic regional intelligence community failed with regard to the threat from Japan. Aldrich argued that the intelligence community was providing accurate forecasts of Japanese intentions, but user departments refused to accept that Southeast Asia represented a soft and attractive target to Japan. On the other hand, Antony Best suggested that Aldrich overestimates the foresight of intelligence reports which tempered their appraisal of Japanese capabilities with the caveat that Japan had previously only been tested against enemies far inferior to the British Empire.[27] As the 1947 SIFE report indicates, intelligence managers in the immediate post-war period instead chose to blame the 'surprise' of the Japanese attack on failings in local intelligence and the lack of sufficient avenues

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[25] Aldrich, *British Intelligence and the War against Japan*, pp. 20-21, 30-31.

[26] Antony Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge*, p. 155; Peter Elphick, *Far Eastern File: The Intelligence War in the Far East, 1930-1945* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), p. 82.

[27] Aldrich, *British Intelligence and the War against Japan*, pp. 53-56; Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge*, p. 168.

for integrating local reports into a regional bigger picture. The JIC also blamed a lack of resources and status.[28] This interpretation had a significant impact on the creation of a much larger and more influential regional intelligence apparatus from 1946.

The hierarchy of intelligence which evolved after the Second World War was created within the context of a broader administrative structure. From 1946-48, this was split in half between the Colonial and Foreign Offices. On 22 May 1946, Malcolm MacDonald was sworn in as Governor General of the British territories in Southeast Asia. This was a non-executive position intended to coordinate the administration of Britain's colonies, although lacking formal powers to coerce individual governments. MacDonald was a former Secretary of State for the Colonies who believed strongly in decolonisation and the Commonwealth. He possessed substantial informal influence, used by MacDonald to have Malayan High Commissioner Edward Gent removed from office in 1948.[29] Within Malaya, he was fully committed to removing the more unsavoury features of colonialism such as 'white-only' clubs. Off-duty, MacDonald was enraptured by beauty: in birds, scenery and the Chinese ceramics he devotedly collected. Even on duty, MacDonald was eccentric, referred to by the British press as the 'shirt-sleeve diplomat' on account of his disdain for wearing formal dress.[30]

Two months before MacDonald was sworn in as Governor General, the Foreign Office implanted its own man in Singapore. This was Miles Lampson, Lord Killearn, who became the Special Commissioner for Southeast Asia. Killearn was a more experienced diplomatist. He cut his teeth in Tokyo and Beijing before rising to serve as Ambassador to Egypt. His office was similarly nebulous to MacDonald's, providing non-executive coordination of Foreign Office posts and monitoring the rice shortages plaguing the area.[31]

These two figureheads of the Singapore regional bureaucracy forged an effective working partnership. The historian A. J. Stockwell has noted that this

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[28] CO 537/2653, JIC(FE)(48)7(Final), JIC(FE) report, 'Lessons on the Organisation of Intelligence in the Far East', 15 July 1948.

[29] Clyde Sanger, *Malcolm MacDonald: Bringing an End to Empire* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), pp. 295-296.

[30] TNA, CO 1030/193, 'The Shirt-Sleeve Diplomat', *The Daily Mail*, 16 May 1955.

[31] Nicholas Tarling, 'Some Rather Nebulous Capacity: Lord Killearn's Appointment in Southeast Asia', *Modern Asian Studies*, 20(3) (1988), 559-600.

was a surprising partnership as Killearn and MacDonald were the very antithesis of one another. Whereas Killearn 'revelled in the pomp and oriental trappings of his office' and was an old Etonian, MacDonald was the grandson of a ploughman and styled himself as a man of the people. Killearn was 'a relic of a previous era' whilst MacDonald was a 'pioneer of the new Commonwealth'.[32] Yet the harmony between them is less surprising than Stockwell suggests. As well as sharing a passion for collecting Chinese ceramics, they had, in fact, a friendly prior acquaintance. In 1929, a much younger MacDonald had visited Beijing for the first time where he had been entertained by Killearn and his family who enjoyed showing him around China's historic sights.[33]

From 1946-47, a regional defence and intelligence structure evolved to serve these harmonious masters. On the defence side, a British Defence Coordination Committee, Far East – BDCC(FE) – was created, bringing together the three commanders-in-chief of the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force (RAF) under the chairmanship of MacDonald. Conversely, the Joint Intelligence Committee in London – JIC(London) – spawned an offshoot in Singapore: the Joint Intelligence Committee (Far East). This JIC(FE) was part of the Special Commissioner's Foreign Office structure. This separation is indicative of the British government's intentions for the intelligence community. Whilst defence was centred upon the colonial obligations of the Governor General, intelligence was at first linked with the Foreign Office and centred upon foreign threats. This would appear a dramatic reversal from the pre-1941 situation, when intelligence was predominantly an imperial security endeavour. The shaping of the regional intelligence and defence architecture from 1946 was an attempt to correct the perceived inadequacies and complacencies of its previous incarnation.

Defining the remit of this new intelligence machine was linked to the growing significance of Singapore in British policy. The concept of 'Southeast Asia', as understood by the British, began with reference to Burma, Thailand, Indochina, Malaya (including Singapore and Borneo) and Indonesia. However, following the expansion of influence of Southeast Asia Command during the

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[32] A. J. Stockwell, 'In Search of Regional Authority in South-East Asia: The Unlikely Partnership of Lord Killearn and Malcolm MacDonald, 1946-8', in *Britain's Retreat from Empire in East Asia, 1905-1980*, ed. by Antony Best (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 117-134 (pp. 122-126).

[33] Malcolm MacDonald, *People and Places* (London: Collins, 1969), p. 100.

Second World War, Britain found itself dealing with a larger area. The decolonisation of India in 1947 also shifted the centre of gravity of Britain's 'East of Suez' interests to Singapore. The definition of Southeast Asia came to include parts of South Asia like Ceylon, and to stretch towards Hong Kong and the Philippines. The regional intelligence community based in Singapore also established hegemony over the oversight of intelligence in East Asia. This represented the ascendancy of Singapore as what a 1947 Foreign Office paper called the 'centre for the radiation of British influence' in Asia.[34]

The regional intelligence community quickly grew into a network of civilian, armed service and joint intelligence structures. Under the auspices of the JIC(FE), joint intelligence organisations were at the top of the hierarchy. The committee was responsible for all-source intelligence evaluation and prepared papers for the national intelligence effort whilst also guiding the regional defence community. This represents the crucial difference between the pre-1941 and post-1945 regional intelligence machines. Although joint service institutions were at the heart of both incarnations, after the Second World War, the enhanced status of the JIC(London) ensured that the new regional system mirrored the Whitehall intelligence make-up. The JIC(FE) provided a crucial link between the regional and national intelligence communities that had been missing in the build-up to war. During the immediate post-war years, the Far East did not bulk large in the concerns of Britain's national intelligence effort. Largely this was because of a strategic focus on Europe and the Middle East, but it also reflected the emerging reality that agencies like the JIC could devolve their Far Eastern responsibilities to Singapore.[35]

The national intelligence machine also underwent reshaping during this period. Two of the most noteworthy features were the importance attached to integration of intelligence at the very top via the JIC and the increasing importance of a national intelligence effort in response to the strategic Soviet threat.[36] In Singapore, the growing centrality of the JIC(London) was transposed

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[34] Remme, *Britain and Regional Cooperation*, p. 5, 11.
[35] Cradock, *Know Your Enemy*, p. 83.
[36] Richard J. Aldrich, 'Secret Intelligence for a Post-War World: Reshaping the British Intelligence Community, 1944-51', in *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War, 1945-51*, ed. by Richard J. Aldrich (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 15-49 (pp. 15-16).

through the creation of the JIC(FE) in early 1947 to replace the Central Intelligence Staff leftover from wartime Southeast Asia Command. It was jointly responsible to the JIC(London) and BDCC(FE), although chaired by the Special Commissioner's representative.[37] Reflecting the imprecise geographical responsibilities of the entire regional structure, the primary responsibility of this early JIC(FE) was Southeast Asia (as per the Special Commissioner and Governor General). However, it also had an important secondary responsibility for a broader Far East incorporating China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia and even India.[38]

Its initial composition was split between three grades. The permanent signing members were the Special Commissioner's representative (Robert Scott) – who acted as chairman – and the three heads of the armed services intelligence staffs. Shortly afterwards a representative of the Governor General was added. This distinction followed the contemporary structure of the parent JIC(London), where only the Foreign Office and three service representatives signed papers. In both London and Singapore, civilian intelligence chiefs from SIS and MI5 were restricted to a lower status as permanent but not signing members.[39] Actual papers were first drafted by a Joint Intelligence Staff (Far East) – JIS(FE) – which shared the signing membership of the JIC(FE).[40]

The early organisation of regional intelligence strongly reflected armed service involvement. Indeed, the subject matter upon which the early JIC(FE) reported was heavily weighted in favour of foreign, particularly strategic, intelligence subjects. MacDonald's deputy, Sir Ralph Hone, noted that there was a tendency to regard information from British territories as not, in the strictest sense, 'intelligence'.[41] The emerging regional intelligence system was, as with the administrative structure it served, a tropical duplication of Whitehall. Like the national intelligence community, its 'genetic code' was built around departmentalism over centralisation. Committees and joint bodies existed to provide integration and consensus.[42] However, just as the JIC(London) was

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[37] FCO 141/16860, Scott to Foreign Office, 27 January 1947.

[38] FCO 141/16860, JIC(FE) report, 'Organisation of Intelligence in South-East Asia', 28 February 1947.

[39] FCO 141/16860, JIC(FE) paper, 'Composition of the JIC(FE)', 28 February 1947.

[40] [TNA] WO 208/4835, Report of Far East Military Attaché's Conference, March 1950 .

[41] CO 537/2653, Hone to Acheson (Colonial Office), 22 May 1948.

[42] Davies, *The Authorised History of British Defence Economic Intelligence*, p. 143.

subordinate to the Chiefs of Staff Committee until 1957, the JIC(FE) was a subsidiary of the BDCC(FE). In practical terms, therefore, it tended towards being a clearing house for defence intelligence rather than a broader all-source and all-types evaluation centre.

The JIC(London) keenly encouraged its Singapore outpost to provide appreciations conforming to strategic or defence-related subjects. In June 1948, the same month as the Malayan insurgency erupted, London requested reports on Soviet interests in the Far East; Soviet capabilities and likelihood of attacking Anglo-American interests; the military situation in China; and the military implications of Japan's surplus population.[43] As well as reflecting the primacy of Cold War concerns about general war with the Soviet Union, this also demonstrates the retention of fears about a resurgent Japan.

The post-war intelligence machine was thus a product of particular interpretations of pre-war intelligence failures, the factors which appeared to have produced intelligence success during the conflict, and the reshaping of the national intelligence effort. In July 1948, the JIC(FE) provided a study of the lessons of war against Japan, condemning the wartime system of intelligence organisation. Insufficient importance had been attached to intelligence despite the fact that 'the Far East provides great opportunity for secret intelligence and clandestine operations of all kinds, both to us and an enemy'. One specific problem was the lack of topographical intelligence in advance, necessitating dangerous photographic overflights during the offensive campaigns of 1945 and hindering forward-planning. In the new Cold War, Britain was determined not to be taken off-guard, actively seeking to learn from the past. Subsequent developments in the Singapore intelligence organisation were important steps in learning from earlier mistakes. As the JIC(FE) noted, 'a democratic country, which cannot afford to maintain armed forces at war strength in peacetime, must take out an insurance policy in the form of a strong and efficient intelligence organisation'. This comment further encapsulates their focus on strategic

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[43] CO 537/2653, Baker-Creswell (Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence) to JIC(London) Secretary, 4 June 1948.

planning.[44] From the very outset it appears possible to speak of a fairly unified regional-national intelligence community. The regional apparatus created in the early post-war years was structurally and conceptually tied to its parentage in the metropole. Nevertheless, by trying to make up for the pre-war focus on imperial security to the detriment of strategic concerns, the new system ran the risk of being unsuitably chartered to deal with the rising imperial security concerns of the late 1940s.

From summer 1948, in response to the outbreak of communist insurgency in Malaya and growing likelihood of a communist victory in mainland China, the JIC(FE) prompted the British colonies of Malaya, Singapore and Hong Kong to create Local Intelligence Committees (LICs). These would replicate on a local level the composition of the JIC, incorporating civilian and service experts to analyse locally produced intelligence. Their introduction fully integrated the JIC system at the national, regional and local levels. However, whilst the Singapore government agreed that such a measure was 'not only desirable but essential', Hong Kong proved more troublesome.[45] The Governor of Hong Kong refused to comply until MI5 Director-General Sir Percy Sillitoe intervened on behalf of the national intelligence effort in August 1949.[46] Arguably the creation of the LICs was an entirely superfluous and inappropriate development outside of the jungle war in the Federation of Malaya. As future chapters make clear, counter-subversion efforts in Singapore were dominated by Special Branch, and the ability to disseminate their reports to variously constituted LICs patronised by service chiefs had little impact on their successful operations (although LIC reports are a boon for the historian). At the local level, security intelligence was paramount, and replicating the strategically-focused regional-national intelligence community did little to assist security services.

Two further joint intelligence structures emerged in Singapore during the late 1940s. Their creation reinforced the defence-dominated intelligence hierarchy. The first was a representative of the Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB). The JIB was created in response to wartime 'lessons' that military planners

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[44] CO 537/2653, JIC(FE)(48)7(Final), JIC(FE) report, 'Lessons on the Organisation of Intelligence in the Far East', 15 July 1948.
[45] CO 537/4321, McKerron to Gimson, 30 September 1948.
[46] [TNA] PREM 8/1068, Creech Jones to Attlee, 10 August 1949.

required up-to-date information in areas such as operational topography, scientific intelligence, war economies and background research into potential future enemies.[47] The JIB was both an inter-service and Commonwealth endeavour with the Far East falling into the responsibility of the Australian JIB(Melbourne) or JIB(M). In practical terms, most of the intelligence the JIB used was open source information.[48] At its core was the belief that high-level espionage and signals intelligence operations needed a background of lower grade research. It also represented a rationalisation of various wartime bodies for producing this sort of joint intelligence.[49]

In addition to the JIC(FE), JIS(FE) and JIB representative, a fourth joint intelligence centre was established in June 1948. This was equally a product of the post-war reshuffling of the national intelligence community. Back in Britain, the wartime Central Interpretation Unit for analysing air photographic intelligence was renamed the Joint Air Photographic Intelligence Centre. On 1 June 1948, this organisation replicated itself in Singapore with the Joint Air Photographic Intelligence Centre, Far East: JAPIC(FE).[50]

The JAPIC(FE) was primarily responsible for the collation and analysis of air photographic (also known as 'image') intelligence. Actual direction of photographic production was provided by the Joint Air Photographic Intelligence Board, Far East: JAPIB(FE). This was a sub-committee of the JIC(FE) chaired by the Chief Intelligence Officer, Far East Air Force (FEAF). JAPIC(FE) had local detachments in Malaya, Singapore and Hong Kong. These were commanded by whichever service had greatest commitment in the area. By 1952, exactly half of JAPIC(FE)'s total strength of 76 personnel were assigned to local detachments: 7 at Butterworth (Malaya), 16 at Kuala Lumpur (Malaya), 8 at Tengah (Singapore) and 7 at Kai Tak (Hong Kong). This distribution shows the priority given to Southeast Asia over the China area, and in particular the insurgency in Malaya.[51]

The composition of these joint intelligence structures indicates how service intelligence outfits enjoyed high status during the early post-war period.

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[47] FCO 141/16998, Circular from JIB(London), 18 December 1947.
[48] FCO 141/16998, Minutes of a meeting held at King's House, Kuala Lumpur, 18 August 1947.
[49] Dylan, *Defence Intelligence and the Cold War*, p. 37.
[50] [TNA] AIR 20/8917, JAPIC(FE) directive, 1 June 1948.
[51] AIR 20/8917, Draft organisational charter of JAPIC(FE), 29 August 1952.

All three fighting services had intelligence collation centres in Singapore. Military intelligence has left the biggest archival footprint. At the national level, MI2 was the section of the Directorate of Military Intelligence responsible for the Middle and Far East during the early Cold War. MI2 reports naturally prioritised military subjects, such as the operational situation in countries beset by communist insurgencies or the progress of the communist advance in China.[52]

As well as benefitting from a system inspired by perceived 'lessons' of the recent war against Japan, service intelligence directorates helped to perpetuate such a system. MI2 argued a similar view to the JIC(FE), that too little attention was given to Southeast Asia before the Second World War due to complacency in the belief of Singapore's impregnability. To meet the Cold War threat, they needed to regard the theatre as a single strategic unit, as 'enemy occupation of any one country would provide jumping-off point for invasion of the whole of SEA [sic]'.[53] Their conception of regional intelligence was geared towards meeting a future strategic threat along similar lines to the rapid Japanese advance through Southeast Asia. With the JIC(FE) signing membership dominated by the armed services, it is littler surprise that the committee focused on strategic evaluations.

Under MI2's authority, a regional military intelligence headquarters was established to serve the Commander-in-Chief of Far East Land Forces (FARELF) in Singapore (see figure 2.1). This was the General Staff Intelligence (GSI) branch. GSI branch collated and analysed intelligence provided from military attachés, Field Security sections and through liaison with civilian agencies including SIS. Their primary responsibilities were to prepare handbooks, order of battle data and personality records relevant to the Far East. MI2 was in turn responsible for summarising and evaluating these reports back in London. This hierarchy ensured that Far Eastern product was integrated into military intelligence appreciations alongside the greater strategic priority of Europe, and thus became part of the national intelligence effort.[54]

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[52] WO 208/3240, Report by Tarver , 'Situation in Far and Middle East', 23 August 1948.

[53] WO 208/4827, Notes by Major P. H. Macmillan (MI2), 18 November 1947.

[54] WO 208/4834, Appendix to MI2 brief, 'Basic Machinery for Intelligence – Middle and Far East', 14 May 1948.
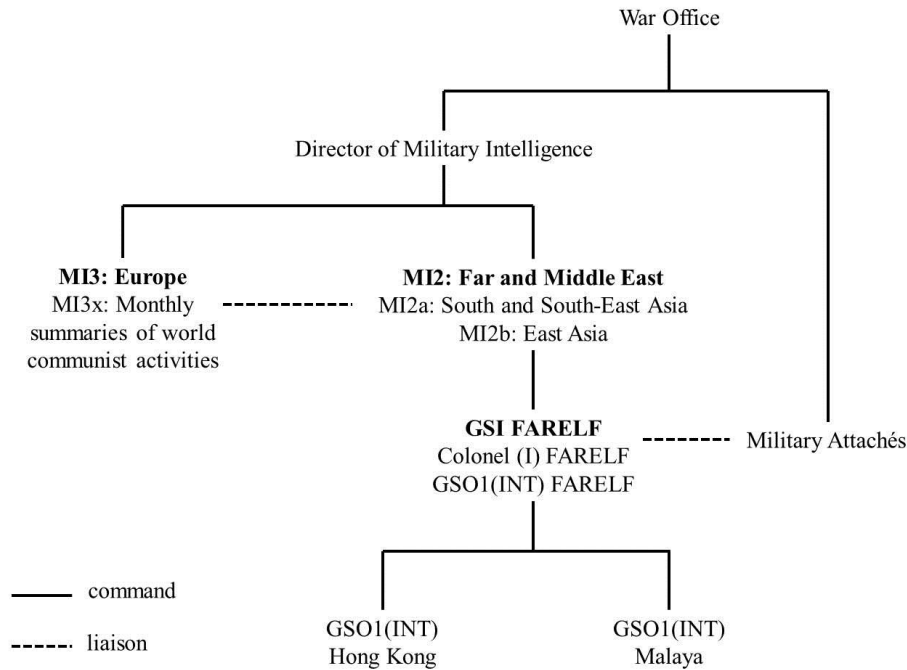
Figure 2.1. Organisation of military intelligence in the Far East, 1948.

Further evidence of the high status accorded to service or defence intelligence can be seen in the control of signals intelligence. Arguably the success of signals intelligence in the European theatre was vital to Allied victory in the Second World War. This was therefore a significant intelligence activity. In wartime Europe, signals intelligence had been controlled by the Government Code and Cypher School, subordinate to SIS. This matured into an independent, civilian Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) during the early Cold War. However, in the Far East, signals intelligence remained the responsibility of the three armed services, particularly the RAF. Only in 1951 were plans enacted to create a GCHQ-administered signals centre alongside the existing RAF Chia Keng intercept station in Singapore.[55]

Civilian intelligence agencies were initially at the bottom of the Singapore regional hierarchy. The two agencies in question were the regional outposts of what would become Britain's most influential intelligence services: SIS and MI5.

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[55] [TNA] DEFE 4/42, Chiefs of Staff Committee (51)76th minutes, 4 May 1951.

Traditional espionage or foreign intelligence was conducted by SIS, which established a Far East Controllerate, sometimes abbreviated to SIS(FE), in Singapore. After the Second World War, SIS simply moved its theatre headquarters over from Ceylon, from where it had directed wartime operations.[56] The remit of the Far East Controller was to give direction to individual SIS field stations as well as to channel their production back to headquarters and liaise with foreign partners. By 1947, SIS had field stations in Hong Kong, China (Tianjin, Shanghai, Nanking, Urumqi), Japan (Tokyo), Indochina (Hanoi) and Indonesia (Batavia). They shortly enacted plans to open new stations in Thailand (Bangkok), Burma (Rangoon) and Korea (Seoul).[57]

Meanwhile, security intelligence was the responsibility of MI5's regional outpost, SIFE. According to a SIFE internal report, the metropolitan government regarded Singapore as the most significant British base in the Far East. This was a turnaround to the situation a decade previous when, until 1939, Hong Kong had been Britain's key defence and intelligence interest in the area. The creation of the naval base, realisation of the vulnerability of Hong Kong, and multiplicity of problems facing Southeast Asia in the late 1940s all contributed to the new status of Singapore. This importance made the defence of Singapore against subversion or espionage a priority of direct concern to MI5 under guidance issued by the Prime Minister.[58] Consequently, whilst SIFE's remit was to conduct regional-level assessment, its approach in doing so was focused on providing security for the British territories of Malaya and Singapore. As such, SIFE became increasingly concerned with the state of local intelligence in those colonies. This created tensions with the local intelligence machine.

On 6 August 1946, the Director-General of MI5, Sir Percy Sillitoe, appointed Colonel Cyril Egerton Dixon as the first Head of Security Intelligence Far East (H/SIFE). Dixon was to command a SIFE headquarters section in Singapore, and as 'theatre head' of MI5 in the Far East, would help coordinate the network of Defence Security Officers (DSOs). These were MI5 liaison officers attached to colonial or Commonwealth territories to offer security intelligence

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[56] Davies, 'SIS Singapore Station', pp. 113-114.
[57] Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 698.
[58] KV 4/422, SIFE Report, 'Assessment of the Value of SIFE', c. December 1947.

advice. They also channelled raw intelligence back from local producers to SIFE headquarters in the old Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank building in Singapore.

SIFE's charter described the new agency as 'an inter-services organisation responsible for the collection, collation and dissemination to interested and appropriate Service and Civil departments of all Security Intelligence affecting British territories in the Far East'. Although described as 'inter-services', in reality it was a regional outpost of MI5, albeit with a few of its initial staff members drawn from service intelligence. H/SIFE had two masters: the Director-General of MI5 and the defence structure which would shortly evolve into the BDCC(FE).[59] SIFE was therefore envisaged as part of the regional administrative system under the Governor General (and subsequently the Commissioner General). Already there was an underlying anachronism, as the defence and intelligence side of this structure covered the entire Far East, whereas MacDonald and Killearn's briefs only covered Southeast Asia.

The SIFE charter is somewhat vague in defining what was meant by 'security intelligence'. In addition, assigning responsibility for collection as well as collation (the former interpretable as the production of raw intelligence whilst the latter implied channelling intelligence produced by other agencies) contained the kernel of future rivalries.

Sillitoe's personal instructions to Dixon contained greater clarity. These directed H/SIFE to fulfil five specific requirements:

1. Collation of intelligence relating to foreign intelligence services whose activities are inimical to British interests.
2. Collation of intelligence relating to any political or subversive movement, indigenous or foreign, which is a potential danger to British security.
3. Detection of clandestine means of communication.
4. Coordination of protective security policy.

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[59] KV 4/421, SIFE charter, 6 August 1946.

5. Supply of information from SIFE records to assist DSOs or other officials in background checks of doubtful aliens, residents or visitors to British territories.[60]

This memorandum demonstrates more explicitly the purpose of SIFE as lying in intelligence collation rather than collection. Whilst covering the entire Far East, the focus was evidently on threats to the British territories in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. This collation activity, according to the SIFE charter, would necessitate close liaison with local intelligence agencies such as colonial Special Branches, SIS field posts in foreign territories, and the intelligence services of friendly foreign powers.[61]

Dixon only lasted a few months in office, being replaced by a Malcolm Johnson at the end of 1946. Johnson had nearly two decades experiences in what was then referred to as 'oriental intelligence work', having previously served in the Delhi Intelligence Bureau in British India. However, Johnson was killed in an air crash shortly after taking up his appointment, and was replaced by an MI5 Head Office appointee, T. 'Hugh' Winterborn (see table 2.1), who struggled to forge good relations with the principal consumers of his intelligence.[62]

Table 2.1. Heads of SIFE, 1946-59

Cyril Egerton Dixon	1946
Malcolm Johnson	1946-47
Hugh Winterborn	1947-48
Alex Kellar	1948-49
Jack Morton	1949-52
Courtenay Young	1952-55
Richard Thistlethwaite	1955-59

Sillitoe's instructions also clarified what MI5 understood by 'security intelligence'. The first task assigned to Dixon was a clear reference to counter-espionage, whilst the subsequent instructions related to counter-subversion and

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[60] KV 4/421, Memorandum of instructions for H/SIFE, 6 August 1946.
[61] KV 4/421, SIFE charter, 6 August 1946.
[62] MAC 15/17/2, Liddell to MacDonald, 22 November 1946; Walton, *Empire of Secrets*, p. 172.

protective security. Therefore, the MI5 view of security intelligence can be defined as counter-espionage plus counter-subversion plus protective security: a definition which closely approximates that given in the previous chapter. These instructions ensured that SIFE's functions were not dissimilar to those of MI5 in Britain. There was one key difference. SIFE officers were not actually producing raw intelligence. Although MI5 operated across the British Empire, it rarely engaged in direct collection outside of Britain, instead operating on a collation and advisory basis.

As a result, some SIFE officers feared that their organisation would become 'merely a post-box' between the DSOs, Governor General's organisation and MI5 Head Office. SIFE officer Courtenay Young noted that MSS already collated information across Malaya and Singapore. Therefore, for SIFE to add something useful for their regional masters, they would need to develop links with SIS in order to create a bigger picture.[63] Thus seeking to avoid duplicating the work of MSS entailed the risk that SIFE would become a rival to the JIC(FE) as a clearing house for multiple-source intelligence. In practice, the strategic focus of the JIC(FE), contrary to the security functions of SIFE, ensured that relations ran smoothly.

Counter-subversion became SIFE's main focus. Even in their first month of operations, Young foresaw that most subversion would be communist-inspired. SIFE saw communist movements as essentially transnational. This helped justify their own existence, as collating security intelligence across territorial boundaries would be essential to meeting this threat.[64] This elevated SIFE from a purely imperial intelligence organisation to part of a regional and national intelligence picture. In this regard, the creation of SIFE addressed some of the failings of the pre-war intelligence system, which was too focused on indigenous problems at the expense of externally-originating security threats such as Japanese espionage.

In the context of the emerging Cold War, counter-espionage concerns were centred upon the Soviet Union (and later China). In late 1946, reports surfaced of a Soviet proposal to establish a new legation at Bangkok housing 200

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[63] KV 4/421, Young (SIFE) to MI5 Head Office, 23 October 1946.
[64] KV 4/421, Report by Young, 'Functions of SIFE', 30 August 1946.

'diplomatic' officials. SIFE and its DSOs were under no illusions that a great many of these officials would be intelligence officers. This could leave the British territories encircled by a Soviet-penetrated Thailand to the north and revolutionary anti-colonial Indonesia to the south.[65] In addition to these paranoid-sounding concerns, SIFE entertained further suspicions that the SOVEXPORTFILM network for distribution of propaganda films was a front for the suspected espionage activities of its Shanghai director.[66] Nonetheless, counter-espionage was a lesser concern than counter-subversion. SIFE theorised that the Soviets would prefer to work through local communist parties than take direct measures to destabilise the European colonies. This view was further evidence of an emerging Cold War attitude which broadened out the remit of imperial security.[67]

Within only a short time, SIFE grew in confidence as a collation centre capable of providing useful appreciations of the regional security picture. Singapore was not only its home but also its conceptual focal point. As aforementioned, the defence of Singapore was a key interest covered by MI5's imperial responsibilities. Other major concerns included the Anglo-Australian long-range weapons programme which they feared was vulnerable to communist penetration utilising lines of communication via Southeast Asia. This was partly the result of signals intelligence. 'Venona' decrypts of Soviet intelligence communications showed that the Australian Department of External Affairs was penetrated by Soviet spies. This prompted Britain to withhold classified information from the joint guided weapons programme and led to MI5 and SIFE officers playing a critical role in the development of an Australian counterpart: the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO).[68]

The creation of SIFE mirrored the appointments of Killearn and MacDonald to guide and coordinate intelligence across the region. The regional intelligence community reflected a desire to avoid one of the perceived key weaknesses of the pre-war intelligence system: disparity between local, regional and national intelligence efforts. SIFE was a particularly important link between the three levels of the new system. Through DSOs, they could incite local

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[65] KV 4/421, DSO Malayan Union to SIFE, 2 December 1946.
[66] FO 959/23, SIFE memorandum, 'Soviet Film Propaganda in the Far East', 3 September 1948.
[67] KV 4/422, SIFE report, 'Assessment of the Value of SIFE', c. December 1947.
[68] Horner, *The Spy Catchers*, p. 53, 57, 91.

governments into more efficient counter-measures against espionage or subversive activity. Early examples included persuading the Hong Kong government to institute more rigorous censorship and its Singapore counterpart to tighten up immigration controls.[69] Meanwhile, SIFE provided regional-level collation and assessment, and through MI5 was tied into the national intelligence effort.

Therefore, a number of trends are apparent in the conception of regional intelligence adopted from 1946. The influence of the Second World War was paramount in shaping the regional intelligence system. Perceived 'lessons' from the recent conflict convinced policy-makers of the need for a growing regional bureaucracy which – rather than producing original raw intelligence – served as a collation, analysis and evaluation centre. This is very much the 'unique window' view espoused by CIA officer Jack Smith: the belief that, firstly, intelligence analysis conducted in-theatre was better than that done in London, and secondly, that Singapore was the ideal location for such work. Not only was it closer to field stations and thus easier to influence local collection, but Singapore itself was seen as representative of the problems faced by the region as a whole. In addition, the influence of the war can also be seen in the precise shape of regional intelligence. Copying the system of national intelligence in London, service intelligence agencies were accorded most influence through a hierarchy which privileged joint intelligence structures. Comparably, strategic intelligence subjects were prioritised over colonial intelligence. The shape of regional intelligence was a reaction to past failings in the theatre (albeit based on questionable interpretations). It was also a metropolitan imposition shaped by national intelligence concerns such as the perceived Soviet threat. In contrast, local intelligence grew organically out of immediate post-war developments and previous legacies, but struggled to find correlation between the anomalous position of MSS, post-war colonial restructuring, and the increasingly coherent regional-national intelligence community. Already there appeared to be two intelligence communities developing in Singapore which were at odds with one another. Despite intelligence collection being concentrated at the local level, the power imbalance clearly benefitted the regional-national agenda.

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[69] KV 4/422, SIFE report, 'Assessment of the Value of SIFE', c. December 1947.

This post-war intelligence architecture did not remain unaltered. By 1948, SIFE was growing in confidence and influence because of the realisation that the primary threat to the area was not strategic but one of security: insurgency. The outbreak of the Malayan Emergency was a catalyst for the revision and expansion of the regional intelligence community, defined more as an instrument of counter-subversion than of strategic defence.

Crisis and catalyst

As the next two chapters demonstrate, the outbreak of the Malayan Emergency in June 1948 had significant repercussions for intelligence operations at all three levels. But no less seismic were its repercussions for the more prosaic world of intelligence organisation. Whilst traditional explanations posit that MSS was disbanded in August 1948 as a result of its failure to predict the outbreak of communist insurgency, in a recent article, Philip Davies and Roger Arditti argued that MSS was dissolved because the MI5 Director-General orchestrated a campaign to undermine it.[70] But although Sillitoe's campaigning played some role, more fundamentally, MSS reporting was hardly satisfactory. Just two days before the outbreak of violence, MSS Director John Dalley recorded that 'there is no immediate threat to internal security'. Indeed, Dalley's Political Intelligence Journals were dense and waffling, containing little evidence that a confrontation was imminent.[71] In March 1947, double agent Lai Tek disappeared with MCP funds, dealing a major blow to intelligence production from which MSS struggled to recover.[72]

Turf wars within the intelligence community coincided with an important change in the regional administration. In May 1948, the posts of Special Commissioner and Governor General were combined into one Commissioner General for Southeast Asia holding directives from both the Foreign and Colonial Offices. This decision was made entirely over the heads of the two incumbents and resulted in MacDonald continuing under this combined office.[73] The British

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[70] Arditti and Davies, 'Rethinking the Rise and Fall', p. 304.
[71] CO 537/6006, Dalley's report on internal security, 14 June 1948.
[72] Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police*, pp. 40-41.
[73] MAC 17/2/20-21, Bevin to Killearn, 6 June 1947.

Government's decision shocked both Killearn and MacDonald who agreed that combining the two offices could be a risky dilution of MacDonald's attentions. As Killearn argued, 'as for the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office have bowled them a fast one and got the middle stump'.[74] Nevertheless, London over-ruled its Singapore representatives and proceeded to combine the two posts. Although contributing to problems in 1948, the new structure soon demonstrated its merits by enabling greater centralisation of the regional intelligence system and better coordination between intelligence producers, assessors and their consumers.

The jurisdictional conflict between SIFE and MSS also came to a head in 1948. For MI5, defining the boundaries of security intelligence (their responsibility) and political intelligence (what they felt MSS or Special Branches should be doing) was all about power. In December 1948, after emerging triumphant from their battle with MSS, H/SIFE Alex Kellar clarified their interpretation of security intelligence as 'information on all subversive or clandestine activities which threaten British interests in the Far East'.[75] In one sense, this broad directive was an attempt to establish SIFE hegemony over security intelligence: a hegemony which MSS had challenged. This was treated as distinct from colonial political intelligence, or information required for the effective administration of a territory by the imperial power. However, in the context of colonial insurgencies, the line between political and security intelligence was blurring. In 1953, the new H/SIFE Courtenay Young maintained that 'in the political scene of South East Asia today, it would, under any circumstances, be impossible to draw a hard and fast line between the two'.[76] Arguably a less divisive definition then suited SIFE interests, with growing attention being given to assisting Special Branches in building up their security intelligence potential.

When producing his landmark report on colonial security in 1955, General Gerald Templer agreed that, since communist threats to the political status of a colony were also a threat to its national security, there was little difference

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[74] MAC 17/2/58-60, Killearn to MacDonald, 9 September 1947.
[75] KV 4/423, Memorandum by Kellar, 'Functions of SIFE and DSOs', 20 December 1948.
[76] KV 4/425, Memorandum by Young, 'The Basic Problems of SIFE Area Posts', 25 September 1953.

between political and security intelligence material.[77] However, he maintained a distinction between political and security intelligence assessment. Templer criticised the Colonial Office for focusing too much on the former. Templer himself had worked alongside a former H/SIFE Jack Morton who served as his Director of Intelligence in Malaya. One of the primary goals of Templer's report was to increase security intelligence assistance from MI5 to the Colonial Office. Therefore, his definition of security intelligence, just like that of Courtenay Young, supported this MI5 intrusion by emphasising the connection between political and security intelligence collection, whilst safeguarding MI5 and SIFE's status through reinforcing the distinction between political and security intelligence assessment.[78]

This process of defining responsibilities for security intelligence was inherently linked with power relations. This was evident in December 1947, when MI5 Director-General Sir Percy Sillitoe complained to the Colonial Office that MSS was beginning to over-step its charter. Sillitoe complained that Dalley was boasting to be running agents into Thailand and liaising directly with the Dutch and Americans in Singapore. If accurate, this was an incursion upon the remits of SIFE and SIS(FE).[79] The following month, an MI5 triumvirate of Sillitoe, Guy Liddell (Deputy Director-General) and Courtenay Young (then a SIFE officer) privately agreed to lobby for MSS to be split up into separate Special Branches, enabling SIFE to establish hegemony over security intelligence.[80]

Dalley constituted not only a jurisdictional challenge but also a perceived hindrance to MI5 operations. According to MI5 sources, the reliability of which is difficult to judge, the MSS Director was – 'in the crudest fashion' – destroying mail intercepted in Malaya on its way to suspect addresses in Hong Kong. This compromised the long-term investigations of the Hong Kong DSO. The communists in Hong Kong realised that their mail was being intercepted and their addresses were blown. This had wider ramifications as Hong Kong was believed

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[77] On the Templer Report, its contents and significance, see: Rory Cormac, 'Organising Intelligence: An Introduction to the 1955 Report on Colonial Security', *Intelligence and National Security*, 25(6) (2010), 800-822.

[78] TNA, CAB 21/2925, Report on colonial security by General Sir Gerald Templer, 23 April 1955: Chapter I, 'Intelligence'.

[79] CO 537/2647, Sillitoe to Lloyd (Colonial Office), 17 December 1947.

[80] KV 4/470, Guy Liddell diary, 23 January 1948.

to be used by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a 'communist liaison centre' for contacting communist parties across Southeast Asia. The DSO was trying to help the local Special Branch monitor these contacts discreetly.[81] Whether or not these allegations were true is less important than how MI5 officers appeared to believe that MSS was a threat to their work, and were prepared to lobby the national intelligence hierarchy and its consumers.

The dispute with MSS assumed a more personal character when Sillitoe met Dalley face-to-face in March 1948. This meeting was dominated by animosity resulting from Dalley having previously derided Sillitoe as 'only a policeman from Glasgow without any security experience'. Conversely, SIFE officer Alec MacDonald was accused with having boasted that MI5 possessed enough influence to get Dalley exiled from Malaya.[82] Perhaps Dalley had some point as Sillitoe, a former Chief Constable, was 'a burly no-nonsense policeman who had cut his teeth suppressing hooliganism in Sheffield and fighting gangs on the mean streets of Glasgow'.[83] Sillitoe struggled to win the support of his own department, but in the case of Dalley's effrontery, MI5 rallied round their Director-General.

Very little was achieved by this meeting in March 1948. One proposition to engender better cooperation was for both MSS and SIFE to report in a monthly meeting to the Singapore Governor. This would have been a severe plummet down the bureaucratic hierarchy for SIFE, as their proper contact was not with local governments but Malcolm MacDonald's regional apparatus. Deputy Director-General Guy Liddell aptly surmised that 'I am afraid that nothing can result from all this except a general stink'.[84]

Liddell's diaries provide interesting insight into MI5 Head Office perspectives during this tumultuous period. In particular, Liddell despaired over what he saw as the naivety of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Arthur Creech Jones. Creech Jones placed great faith in colonial economic development as the best antidote to communism – not dissimilar to the ideas behind the Marshall Plan – but was less keen to turn the British Empire into a security state.

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[81] CO 537/2650, SIFE review of communism, 23 February 1948; KV 4/470, Liddell diary, 6 May 1948.
[82] FCO 141/15436, Notes of a meeting held at Government House, Singapore, 20 March 1948.
[83] Aldrich and Cormac, *The Black Door*, p. 140.
[84] KV 4/470, Liddell diary, 13 April 1948.

Liddell was exasperated by the £100,000 being spent on a Malayan University when there were not enough policemen or spies to keep law and order. Of the Secretary of State, Liddell wrote that 'his policy really is to teach the colonial children to run before they can walk, without giving them any nurses to see that they do not get into mischief'.[85] As well as displaying an imperialistic attitude which appears endemic in Britain's Far Eastern intelligence milieu, Liddell appears to have missed the point that, with the 'nurses' in such disarray amongst themselves, perhaps the intelligence community was as much the problem as the solution.

Meanwhile, H/SIFE Hugh Winterborn was not immune from criticism. Liddell blamed him for not paying more frequent visits to his consumers. Even though Dalley's intelligence product was suspect – as Liddell wrote, 'it is better that the Government should have no information than inaccurate information' – Dalley was simply more visible than Winterborn.[86] As a result, MSS seemed to enjoy a stronger dissemination relationship with their consumers. MacDonald had only recently being upgraded to Commissioner General, and still retained a Colonial Office mentality in his parochial, Malaya-first priorities, which was to the benefit of MSS.

The Malayan Emergency broke out following a spate of murders on rubber estates on 16 June 1948. Due to growing criticism of Winterborn from both local consumers and MI5 Head Office, the incumbent H/SIFE was reduced to deputy and Sillitoe's favourite overseas trouble-shooter was brought in as temporary Director. The new H/SIFE was the sharkskin-jacketed Alex Kellar, who was previously instructed to sort out SIME's teething troubles.[87]

Traditionally, historians of the Malayan Emergency maintained that MSS was disbanded and replaced by separate Special Branches in Malaya and Singapore because its intelligence product was woefully inadequate. In short, it failed to predict the communist insurgency. This has been challenged by Davies and Arditti, who argued that it was MI5's campaign to undermine MSS which was

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[85] KV 4/470, Liddell diary, 28 July 1948.
[86] KV 4/470, Liddell diary, 13 April 1948; KV 4/470, Liddell diary, 23 April 1948.
[87] MAC 16/2/14, Creech Jones to MacDonald, 1 September 1948. See also: Walton, *Empire of Secrets*, 172-173, 244.

principally responsible.[88] However, their revisionist argument is not watertight, placing too much emphasis on MI5's political capital and under-estimating MSS' own structural and cognitive failings.

Whilst Dalley did warn of the increasing likelihood of an open clash with communism throughout 1947 and 1948, this was lost within the waffle and irrelevance which constituted MSS Political Intelligence Journals. It is little surprise that his supposed warnings (a term which stretches credibility) went unheeded. For example, in May 1948, Dalley's reports discussed signs of potential MCP mobilisation, the opening up of old arms dumps and tightening of security amongst the wartime communist guerrilla's Ex-Comrades Association. However, there was no real attempt at analysing these trends, and certainly no evaluation giving the impression that a revolt was imminent. This was a major difference between MSS and SIFE reports, as the latter placed more emphasis on analysis of trends.[89] To return to the ideas discussed in the introduction, MSS reports were of the basic descriptive type, whereas those of SIFE were more current reportorial.

The outbreak of violence in June 1948 took the colonial government by surprise. In Singapore, MSS worked much closer with the police than in the Federation. Following the events in rural Malaya of 16 June, they quickly began rounding up suspected communists who had been identified on the MSS card index. However, they soon ran out of arrest books for logging detentions and releases, and were forced to improvise by adapting deposit and withdrawal books given to them by one of Singapore's banks. These artefacts – preserved in the Internal Security Department Heritage Centre in Singapore – are implicit of the panic which ensued in summer 1948 and the lack of preparations made for it.[90] Such a situation could be indicative of a lack of adequate intelligence leading up to the outbreak of Emergency. It could also represent the colonial government's possibly over-zealous reaction to the initially isolated acts of violence.

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[88] Arditti and Davies, 'Rethinking the Rise and Fall', pp. 293-294.
[89] Bodleian Library, Mss Ind Ocn s. 251, MSS Political Intelligence Journals, Journal 10/1948, 31 May 1948.
[90] I would like to thank the Internal Security Department for showing me these fascinating artefacts on a visit of 22 February 2019.

Apportioning MSS with the sole blame for this perceived intelligence failure suited the interests of more than just MI5. The Chiefs of Staff were dissatisfied with the national JIC for failing to foresee the rebellion. Blaming hapless local actors ensured the JIC(FE) was absolved of blame, and by implication cemented the position of the wider regional intelligence system. Both SIFE and the JIC(FE) were parented by the national intelligence apparatus, whereas MSS lacked similar support at the metropole.[91]

Likewise, MI2 posed awkward questions as to why GSI branch in Singapore failed to provide any forewarning. The regional head of military intelligence, Colonel Grazebook, followed the example of SIFE and the JIC(FE) by laying the blame squarely on the shoulders of MSS. Grazebook explained that he had wound down the intelligence collection activities of Field Security in February 1948 at the request of the civilian authorities, but MSS proved inadequate to fill the gap. Whilst Dalley boasted of possessing much information about the MCP, this was never passed on to either GSI or the JIC(FE). The only MSS reports they received were the Political Intelligence Journals, which Grazebrook felt were totally inadequate:

> The gravity of the situation was never sufficiently stressed in [the Journals] and their significance escaped us. I don't want to hang out the dirty linen too much before your eyes, but frankly the organisation for evaluating and disseminating the available information was far from perfect.[92]

Perhaps more importantly, the writing was already on the wall before the Malayan Emergency began. The structure of MSS was entirely at odds with the reality that the Federation of Malaya and Singapore were two separate territories and would remain as such for the foreseeable future. In May 1948, Singapore Governor Franklin Gimson had tabled a proposal to replace MSS with two Special Branches, albeit with Dalley retaining control of a much-reduced collation and coordination centre. This would also produce greater conformity to the imperial norm for colonial intelligence agencies to be under police authority and therefore seen as professional, apolitical bodies. However, such a proposal would have constituted an even greater jurisdictional overlap between Dalley's new collation

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[91] Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies*, p. 33.
[92] WO 208/3931, Colonel Grazebrook to Tarver, 7 July 1948.

centre and SIFE.[93] MSS was therefore at odds with established systems of governmental and intelligence organisation. It is unlikely that Gimson's plan would have worked, especially given Dalley's irascible personality. In the event, MSS was officially disbanded on 23 August 1948.[94] However, whilst this appeared to signal the end of a significant challenge to SIFE's hegemony, it was just the beginning of a sharp deterioration in their relations with one of their principal consumers: Malcolm MacDonald.

MacDonald disapproved of the way in which Dalley was discarded to the intelligence scrap-heap. The Commissioner General blamed MI5 for using metropolitan muscle to enforce changes within Southeast Asia. He complained that 'Sillitoe's effort to force on us proposals which he knows that we shall object to makes an extremely unpleasant impression on me'.[95] MacDonald saw Sillitoe as an empire-builder, undermining MSS to safeguard SIFE's hegemony. There is some merit to this assertion, as the MSS intelligence journals were replaced by a 'Pan-Malayan Review' of intelligence in the Federation and Singapore: the sort of collation envisaged in Gimson's plan of May 1948 albeit sans Dalley. These Pan-Malayan Reviews were divided into two sections. The two Special Branches jointly authored a 'political' intelligence review, followed by a 'security' counterpart prepared by the MI5 DSO. This fulfilled MI5's desire for a distinction between political and security intelligence which benefitted their own position in the intelligence hierarchy.[96] On a practical level, it proved to be a more effective system of intelligence dissemination which facilitated greater coordination between local and regional intelligence.

Following the abolition of MSS, MacDonald lobbied for Dalley to be offered a position within SIFE. He placed great faith in Dalley's local experience and abilities as an intelligence officer, stretching credibility by arguing that 'he is the only man whose information has proved reliable'. To the Secretary of State for the Colonies, MacDonald wrote that:

> We are in trouble today largely because Dalley's information and advice about the Communist menace in the Federation was not accepted by the

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[93] FCO 141/16838, Notes of a meeting held at Government House, Singapore on 11 May 1948.
[94] Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police*, p. 43.
[95] MAC 16/2/16-17, MacDonald to Hone, 5 September 1948.
[96] MAC 16/2/25, Kellar to MacDonald, 10 September 1948.

police, who in turn apparently persuaded the late High Commissioner to reject Dalley's information and advice.[97]

MacDonald was correct in highlighting the poor relations between MSS and the Malayan Police. However, he was swimming against the tide in trying to argue that Dalley's intelligence was essentially sound.

The Commissioner General escalated the dispute by proposing to eradicate the existing intelligence set-up. Supported by the Governors of Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo, MacDonald argued that SIFE was inadequate because of its lack of local expertise.[98] After a governors' conference at his palace of Bukit Serene, MacDonald reported to the Colonial Office that:

> As you know we are far from satisfied with the service which we have received from SIFE… If we were free to do so, we would recommend a very different set-up… for there are grounds for thinking that the division of duties between SIFE and [SIS] which may be desirable in some other parts of the world is extremely unsuitable in South-East Asia and the Far East.[99]

MacDonald's intelligence heresy favoured one organisation for security and foreign intelligence under his own auspices. He envisaged combining SIFE and SIS(FE) into one organisation reporting directly to the Commissioner General. Ironically a partial MI5-SIS merger in Singapore was subsequently adopted at a later stage, but in 1948 this consumer revolt was abruptly quashed.

Unfortunately for MacDonald, his assault was leaked to both Sillitoe and the Chief of SIS. The Commissioner General was forced to backtrack that he was only 'thinking aloud'. Liddell was not impressed. He believed that 'there is no doubt that MacDonald has lost his head about Dalley, as he now has nobody who comes and whispers things into his ear'.[100]

MacDonald's challenge came to nothing. The regional Commanders-in-Chief backed SIFE, for which they felt responsible owing to its reporting status to the BDCC(FE). Whilst in-theatre colonial officials sided with MacDonald, MI5 performed better at garnering metropolitan Colonial Office support. Briefly

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[97] MAC 16/2/19-21, MacDonald to Creech Jones, 7 September 1948.
[98] MAC 16/2/41, MacDonald to Lloyd (Colonial Office), 30 November 1948.
[99] MAC 16/2/42-43, MacDonald to Lloyd (2), 30 November 1948.
[100] KV 4/470, Liddell diary, 29 December 1948.

visiting London, Kellar persuaded the Southeast Asia Department that MacDonald's critique stemmed from resentment that SIFE did not act as his 'personal intelligence staff'.[101] However, MacDonald's 'thinking aloud' proved a positive influence in another regard, as it highlighted the need for better integration of regional intelligence with its user departments.

Back in Singapore, Kellar went to considerable effort to repair relations. He patiently explained to MacDonald that SIFE was not a producer of raw intelligence, so could not be blamed for cognitive failure in Malaya. Kellar tried to make MacDonald realise that most of his criticisms should be targeted at the local intelligence producers.[102]

This patience paid off. Perhaps Kellar was assisted by circumstances as MacDonald grew into his enlarged role as Commissioner General: his first diplomatic appointment outside the colonial or Commonwealth sphere. By the time Kellar departed Singapore in May 1949, 'it was clear that [MacDonald] no longer entertained his earlier ill-informed criticisms of SIFE'.[103] During their final few weeks, MacDonald and Kellar were highly successful in helping to strengthen dissemination relationships across the regional intelligence system. When Kellar departed, MacDonald praised his constructive work, leaving 'our organisation and preparedness […] much stronger for your few months' work here'.[104]

MacDonald's organisation moved into a new purpose-built complex at Phoenix Park, housing intelligence agencies such as the JIC(FE), SIS and SIFE alongside their consumers. This provided opportunity for unprecedented unity. At a governors' conference in January 1949, MacDonald attacked the Singapore Special Branch for its unwillingness to cooperate with SIFE. He appeared to understand the purpose of SIFE and to appreciate that its utility rested on improving the intake of raw intelligence from local agencies. Conversely, Kellar's relations with individual local governments were deteriorating. In particular, Singapore Governor Franklin Gimson did not discard his resentment over Dalley so easily as MacDonald, remaining in Kellar's grossly politically incorrect words

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[101] CO 537/2647, Note by Paskin on a conversation with Kellar, 31 December 1948.
[102] KV 4/471, Liddell diary, 3 January 1949; KV 4/423, Letter from Kellar to MacDonald, 19 December 1948.
[103] KV 4/423, Kellar to Sillitoe, 2 March 1949.
[104] MAC 15/7/18, MacDonald to Kellar, 7 May 1949.

'the principal n***** in the woodpile'.[105] Colonial governments appeared to resent any move to centralise authority under MacDonald.

The most important changes enacted in this period revolved around the JIC(FE). Kellar successfully used MI5 influence to lobby the JIC(London) into making the JIS(FE) a full-time secretariat in February 1949, rather than drawing ad hoc on officials from the JIC(FE) constituents.[106] But this did not go far enough. Newly convinced of the value of the regional intelligence apparatus, MacDonald wanted a full-time Foreign Office chairman for the JIC(FE) (see table 2.2).

Table 2.2. JIC(FE) chairmen and their Foreign Office positions, 1946-59.

Robert H. Scott	1947	Counsellor, Special Commissioner's Office
Herbert N. Brain	1947-48	Deputy Special Commissioner
Patrick S. Scrivener	1948-49	Deputy Commissioner General for Foreign Affairs
Michael J. Creswell	1949-51	Counsellor, Commissioner General's Office *JIC(FE) Permanent Chairman*
Michael N. F. Stewart	1951-54	
Andrew G. Gilchrist	1954-56	
Denis A. Greenhill	1956-59	

In 1948-49, the position was filled by the Deputy Commissioner General for Foreign Affairs, but MacDonald and the Commanders-in-Chief argued that a permanent, specialised official would be better equipped to oversee the extensive intelligence problems in the region. Conversely, the Foreign Office and JIC(London) were opposed to the scheme, worrying that a permanent chairman would lack the political capital to carry weight with the committee's members. However, because of Colonial Office support and MacDonald's growing influence in Whitehall, the Singapore view emerged triumphant. In May 1949, the

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[105] KV 4/423, Kellar to Sillitoe, 2 March 1949.
[106] Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies*, p. 36.

Foreign Office appointed its Counsellor in Tehran, Michael Creswell, as full-time JIC(FE) Chairman.[107]

In September 1949, the JIC(FE) charter was officially revised to take account of these changes. It now included H/SIFE, the JIB Representative and the SIS Far East Controller as signing members. In addition, the committee was assigned wider direct responsibilities for a region including China and Soviet satellite Outer Mongolia. The entire Soviet Union was included as an area of indirect interest. This expansion of JIC(FE) responsibility is implicit of the concern for a developing Cold War in the Far East.[108]

The revised charter included reference to 'security intelligence', implying the newly entrenched position of SIFE as an indispensable organ of Phoenix Park and growing centrality of security intelligence to the regional bigger picture. The JIC(FE) could also direct the provision and control of intelligence sources except for those provided by SIFE and SIS(FE). This further highlights the growing status of SIFE, able to contribute fully to the JIC but not subject to operational oversight. It is also indicative of the growing centralisation of intelligence direction in the Far East in three main bodies: the JIC(FE), SIFE and SIS(FE).[109]

In addition, a new Security Sub-Committee of the BDCC(FE) was inaugurated to review and coordinate protective security. This new body advised on physical security of premises and documents, restrictive security (cyphers and classification grading) and personnel security (vetting). This activity occupied a dubious position under the influence of both SIFE and a Foreign Office Regional Security Officer attached to Phoenix Park. However, H/SIFE was chosen as the chairman of the new sub-committee, further entrenching SIFE's position.[110] The position of Regional Security Officer was dissolved in March 1955 because it was

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[107] KV 4/471, Liddell diary, 1 April 1949; [TNA] FO 371/76084, Minute by R. H. Scott, 22 February 1949.
[108] FCO 141/1570, JIC(49)(59)(Final), Charter for JIC(FE) approved by JIC(London), 10 September 1949.
[109] FCO 141/1570, JIC(49)(59)(Final), Charter for JIC(FE) approved by JIC(London), 10 September 1949.
[110] FCO 141/14416, Terms of reference of the Security Sub-Committee, Far East, 20 January 1949; FCO 141/14416, Draft memorandum by the Security Sub-Committee, Far East, c. 24 May 1950.

essentially duplicating SIFE duties (recognising that the expertise of MI5 was far greater than the Foreign Office).[111]

These changes to the regional intelligence system in 1948-49 produced a more coordinated structure which significantly improved dissemination relationships. The rejuvenated consumer relations which burgeoned in the subsequent period were partly a result of these structural changes. They also reflected the importance of individual personalities committed to improving relationships. This process of consolidation was critical to the emergence of a regional-national intelligence community which matches the understanding of the concept of national intelligence discussed in the previous chapter. As aforementioned, in the British model, this definition was somewhat fluid and membership of such a community was not fixed. In Singapore, this is evident in the initial presence of MSS as a permanent observer to the JIC(FE) and its dismissal. The changes to the JIC(FE) in 1948-49 reinforced its position at the apex of the intelligence hierarchy, effectively enforcing a model of intelligence organisation which replicated the national intelligence system. Bringing SIS and MI5 fully into this community equally embraced the post-war national model.

One other development of 1949 is implicit of a changing direction for regional intelligence. This was the creation by the Foreign Office of a Regional Information Office (RIO) with a remit for collating 'propaganda intelligence'. RIO was created in direct response to calls from Malcolm MacDonald to intensify propaganda efforts as part of counter-subversion policy in the wake of the Malayan Emergency. MacDonald argued that 'in this war the most effective ammunition is ideas, the most potent weapon for firing them off are information and propaganda services'.[112] The first director of RIO, John Rayner, defined 'propaganda intelligence' as both material which could be adapted for use in propaganda or analysing trends in communist information policy.[113] The latter function was of particular interest to the existing intelligence community, as RIO evaluations of communist (particularly Chinese) radio broadcasts could help other agencies better understand the opaque foreign policy of communist states as well

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[111] KV 4/427, Director-General's record of meeting with Malcolm MacDonald, 9 July 1955.
[112] FCO 141/15452, Speech by Malcolm MacDonald, 14 July 1949.
[113] FCO 141/15452, Minutes of a conference of Information and Public Relations Officers in Southeast Asia, 14-15 July 1949.

as the political aims of insurgent movements. RIO collated material including captured documents from insurgents in Malaya as well as radio monitoring reports on broadcasts from Moscow and Beijing. Much of this was passed on from other intelligence services such as SIFE. In return, RIO distributed its own analyses throughout the Phoenix Park intelligence community.[114]

Summary

The decision to establish RIO is revealing of the changing shape of regional intelligence between the intentions of the British government in 1946 and the practicalities of 1949. Singapore's initial post-war intelligence architecture was highly influenced by perceptions of intelligence failings in the run-up to the Second World War. Intelligence and defence planners believed that the previous regional system, the FECB, lacked clout and they needed to create a new community which would have broader remit, greater authority and better relationships with user departments. Equally, the success of the JIC during the war and the legacy of the Japanese attacks of December 1941 ensured that regional intelligence was heavily geared towards strategic defence concerns. Imperial security took second place and was initially less integrated into the overall intelligence product. The regional level of intelligence was greatly shaped by national agendas and agencies, and thus it is possible to speak of the emergence of a regional-national intelligence community during this period.

Conversely, local intelligence production easily adapted to the changing circumstances of the post-war world under the British Military Administration. However, the decision to adopt an anomalous system of local intelligence (MSS) which failed to correlate with constitutional developments and threatened the position of the regional-national community hindered developments from 1946-48. The two most significant trends in Singapore's local intelligence were the assumption by key officials such as Alan Blades that communism would be the

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[114] [TNA], FO 1110/281, PR 5/112, Report on RIO activities for the Cabinet Committee on Colonial Information Policy, 16 September 1950; FO 1110/187, PR 3224/9G, Rayner to Murray, 18 October 1949.

next great challenge, and the decision to revert to a Special Branch organisation following the discrediting of MSS by its regional rivals.

Overall, it is therefore apparent that intelligence organisation during the period 1946-49 was highly influenced by power relationships and differing assumptions about post-war intelligence priorities. There was already a discrepancy between a local intelligence community focused on countering potential communist subversion and a regional-national intelligence community which was more interested in the strategic threat from the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the outbreak of insurgency in Malaya in June 1948 catalysed the revision and expansion of regional intelligence along lines more focused on counter-subversion and imperial security. Such a shift moved away from intelligence priorities determined by British national agendas and towards the recognition of local and regional concerns. This benefitted the status of SIFE, and had the potential to facilitate greater integration between the three levels of intelligence. The creation of RIO bolstered this shift in favour of both a defensive and proactive counter-subversion agenda. The next two chapters examine how, during the same period, intelligence analysis and dissemination was affected by the Malayan Emergency, and how the revived Singapore Special Branch contributed to active counter-subversion measures. Later chapters explore the extent to which the refocusing of regional intelligence in 1949 bridged the divide between the two intelligence communities at a practical level.

3. The onset of a Cold War in Asia

The outbreak of the Malayan Emergency was an important catalyst in the transition from a 'post-war' model of intelligence organisation to a 'Cold War' system which emphasised imperial security and counter-subversion. This chapter explores the importance of intelligence networks in guiding the response of policy-makers to the onset of a Cold War in Southeast Asia. Despite a dearth of raw intelligence being produced at the local level, the collation machinery in Singapore proved highly effective in influencing both Lord Killearn and Malcolm MacDonald. This generated opportunities to influence national policy.

Cold War interpretations quickly dominated intelligence assessment and dissemination. These were not, however, insensitive to local distinctions and did not necessarily imply a monolithic or Soviet-dominated view of communism. The regional level of intelligence, particularly the JIC(FE) and SIFE, linked fairly nuanced analysis of the situation in Southeast Asia with national intelligence assessments which emphasised the limited scope of Soviet activity. Security intelligence was particularly influential in shaping how policy-makers approached regional developments, even if only confirming previously held assumptions. This is not to say that intelligence agencies were influential over specific policy choices, particularly in Malaya. JIC assessments on Malaya often lacked tangible policy impact because they were more geared towards long-term defence planning for conventional wars.[1] However, intelligence generated by the regional-national community helped influence the perceptive context of decision-making by providing users with a range of basic interpretative and current reportorial assessments on events as they unfolded. Nevertheless, raw information collection became conspicuous as the key weakness in the intelligence process.

By collating information from across Southeast Asia, SIFE and the JIC(FE) drew conclusions about trends in communist policy. Initially, they applied a Cold War paradigm emphasising Soviet and Chinese direction of local communism, sometimes insensitive to local distinctions. This was an issue across the British intelligence community. During the violence which began in 1948, the JIC(London) 'viewed the [Malayan] conflict predominantly through a Cold War

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[1] Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies*, pp. 53-55.

prism and simplistically conflated imperial developments with Cold War developments'.[2] Comparably, SIFE showed some tendency to subordinate local developments to the global conflict. In December 1947 they concluded that the Soviets preferred to work through local communists because it was easier and cheaper than direct destabilising action against the European empires.[3] However, they soon began to make more nuanced distinctions of the relationship between local communists and Moscow.

The historian Geoff Wade argued that, in the years 1946-47, British officials were watchful but sanguine about communist prospects in Southeast Asia. He proposed that the violence of 1948 and victory of the CCP in the Chinese Civil War in 1949 provided for the start of a proper Cold War by giving substance to previously vague anxieties.[4] Wade's argument was shared by Tilman Remme, who posited that the Malayan Emergency was a watershed marking the extension of the Cold War to the Far East and the start of a British approach in dealing with communism on a regional basis.[5] By evaluating the intelligence background to official positions, this chapter indicates that pre-1948 Cold War perceptions and regional solutions were more advanced and significant than Wade or Remme acknowledged. As shown in the previous chapter, security intelligence representatives of the British Military Administration were already advocating a less complacent attitude towards local communists in 1946. SIFE became the most significant agency in influencing these perceptions at the regional and national level, because its remit for security intelligence was most applicable to the main threats of insurgency and subversion in Southeast Asia.

Guiding policy through intelligence assessment

Intelligence is not produced in a vacuum but can be a vital part of an effective policy-making machine. Moving away from the organisation of intelligence activities in Singapore, we must also consider the impact of processed

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[2] Cormac, *Confronting the Colonies*, p. 51.
[3] KV 4/424, SIFE Report, 'Assessment of the Value of SIFE', c. December 1947.
[4] Geoff Wade, 'The Beginnings of a "Cold War" in Southeast Asia: British and Australian Perceptions', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 40(3) (2009), 543-565 (pp. 548-549, 565).
[5] Remme, *Britain and Regional Cooperation*, p. 133.

intelligence on policy-making. Analysing the assessment and dissemination process indicates that there was growing cohesion between the regional and national levels of intelligence which supported the transition of policy-making bodies towards a more proactive Cold War awareness.

From spring 1947, SIFE produced a monthly round-up of communist activities. These were disseminated to MI5 Head Office, SIS, the Colonial and Foreign Offices and armed service departments.[6] As well as being distributed to the metropole, these also gave guidance to regional policy-makers. These reports keenly influenced the developing anti-communist perceptions of Special Commissioner Lord Killearn and Governor General Malcolm MacDonald.

Although primarily focused on rice shortages, Killearn first reported upon Cold War regional tensions in December 1946. Killearn then agreed with the British Minister in Moscow, Frank Roberts, that, although Southeast Asia was outside the scope of Soviet expansionist designs, it offered excellent opportunities for disruptive activities against the West. Roberts and Killearn expected Moscow to cause trouble in Southeast Asia to shift the global balance of power and favour their position in Europe. For Killearn, Britain's best defence was to promote healthy political and economic conditions which would stifle opportunities for communist agitation.[7] Roberts was a key figure in the development of a Cold War consensus within the Foreign Office, authoring a series of despatches in March 1946 with marked similarity to George Kennan's 'long telegram'.[8] Killearn's explicit agreement with and reference to Roberts' conclusions is significant in showing the influence of ideas from one region to another within the British Foreign Office.

Over the course of the following year, the Special Commissioner's reports demonstrated growing concern with communist subversion. In July 1947, Killearn acted as a conduit to disseminate to the Foreign Office the recent SIFE conclusions that:

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[6] WO 208/4830, Distribution list for SIFE review of communism, 30 November 1948.
[7] FCO 141/14370, Killearn to Attlee, 4 December 1946.
[8] Sean Greenwood, 'Frank Roberts and the 'Other' Long Telegram: The View from the British Embassy in Moscow, March 1946', *Journal of Contemporary History,* 25(1) (1990), 103-122.

a) International communist communications had not yet been fully re-established following wartime disruption.

b) Communist parties were growing in strength, aided by economic difficulties and labour unrest.

c) Communists were fomenting nationalism as the first step towards their ultimate goal.

d) They presently lacked overall direction.

e) Communist parties presented a direct menace to security in the Far East. They were bound to be directly or indirectly controlled by Moscow, albeit temporarily out of touch.[9]

The Special Commissioner further predicted that the new Soviet legation in Thailand could provide the direction which was currently absent. This appreciation by SIFE and its intake by Killearn implied a monolithic view of local communism as being under Soviet control and part of a broader international movement. Inspired by SIFE's warning, Killearn renewed his call for measures to promote regional stability, adding that the best antidote may well be 'the speedy development of self-government on truly democratic lines'.[10] As Killearn later explained, 'if you suppress a nationalist severely enough you will find him tending towards communism because it is the communists who have consistently supported nationalist movements in dependent territories'.[11] These statements indicate how the process of decolonisation could be subordinated to a Cold War paradigm by decision-makers. Killearn's reaction typifies the prevailing view in intelligence assessment in 1947, which was still focused on external control and influence of local communist movements.

Concurrently, Governor General Malcolm MacDonald responded more proactively to SIFE's new monthly reports. His actions suggest that decision-makers were less sanguine and watchful before 1948 than Geoff Wade implied, but were instead seeking out possible counter-measures and involving the intelligence community in the policy-making process. On 26 June 1947, MacDonald convened a special conference with SIFE, MSS and local colonial

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[9] CAB 21/1956, Killearn to Bevin, 15 July 1947.
[10] CAB 21/1956, Killearn to Bevin, 15 July 1947.
[11] CO 537/2650, Killearn to Bevin, 2 February 1948.

officials. Summarising concerns over growing communist influence over labour in Malaya and Singapore, MacDonald said:

> That Communism was Enemy No. 1 in these territories and in South-East Asia. It was already a very serious one and was capable of becoming quite a formidable one, and without falling into the error of exaggeration or excitement it had to be realised that Communism would have to be dealt with in a pretty big and effective way.[12]

Following the special conference, H/SIFE Hugh Winterborn prepared a paper examining methods for countering communist underground activities. The SIFE chief agreed with Killearn that communism could not be countered merely through suppression. Britain needed to offer an alternative positive model, demonstrating that nineteenth century imperialism was dead.[13] SIFE was united with its principal consumers in holding up colonial reform not as an end in itself but a solution to Cold War security dilemmas. Throughout SIFE's operation, the contexts of the Cold War and decolonisation were treated as largely inseparable. Within the Singapore intelligence communities more broadly, imperial security was consistently conflated with Cold War imperatives.

Shortly before leaving Singapore in spring 1948, Killearn reported that, on the basis of SIFE information, it was unlikely that recently received reports of the founding of a Far Eastern Cominform were true.[14] This marks a subtle transformation in the substance of analysis reaching policy-makers. SIFE was moving away from explanations which involved direct Soviet involvement.

The scare over a Far Eastern Cominform was an important step in the development of more nuanced Cold War perceptions. Although ultimately proved false, the seriousness with which such reports were treated is indicative of the lack of any firm information on Soviet intentions and the influence of growing Cold War paranoia in the metropole. The formation of the actual Cominform in September 1947 and Andrei Zhdanov's 'two camp' speech marked a new departure in analysis of the global Cold War, leading to an intensified intelligence effort in Southeast Asia. Zhdanov was Chairman of the lower chamber of the Supreme Soviet and in charge of the Cominform: the Communist Information

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[12] FCO 141/16943, Minutes of Governor General's special conference, 26 June 1947.
[13] FCO 141/16943, Paper by Winterborn, 30 August 1947.
[14] FO 371/69694, Killearn to Bevin, 2 February 1948.

Bureau. Zhdanov used the Cominform, designed to coordinate between communist parties across the world, to propagate the idea that the world had descended into two camps and that it would be impossible to remain aloof. Ultimately, SIFE was successful in weeding out the reliability of incoming reports, judging the so-called 'Far Eastern Cominform' to be a fabrication of the Nationalist Chinese propaganda machine (trying to frighten the Western powers into giving them greater support).[15] This showed the beginning of a more balanced view.

The situation in East Asia proved more susceptible to paranoia and rumour than Southeast Asia. MI2 chief Charles Tarver arrived in Okinawa in late 1947 to be told by an American that the Soviets had withdrawn from the United Nations and that war was inevitable. Worrying that such a development had indeed occurred during his flight, Tarver was relieved to ascertain that this was nonsense. Nevertheless, the implications were telling: 'there are a large number of warmongers about in the East, many of whom believe that this war will start as a result of an incident in Korea'.[16]

In early 1948, the UK Military Advisor in Tokyo passed on information from the Americans that supported rumours of the formation of a Far Eastern Cominform.[17] MI2 openly disagreed with SIFE, arguing that SIFE's dismissal of these rumours as Nationalist Chinese fabrications went contrary to several reports received by military intelligence from Tokyo and Saigon. Tarver accepted that there may not be a separate Cominform but opined that there was certainly more organised communist coordination than SIFE credited. With the benefit of hindsight, SIFE's view appears correct, which perhaps indicates that MI2 was overly optimistic in its reliability assessments.[18] The reliance of British intelligence on American or Nationalist Chinese sources for information about East Asia was a major problem in providing reliable analysis for the entire Far East. Another dubious source of information was the military intelligence agent Captain Vendeniapin: a Hong Kong-based White Russian who provided sub-agents inside China. Although MI2 suspected Vendeniapin of CCP sympathies,

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[15] CO 537/2650, SIFE Review of Communism, 23 January 1948.
[16] WO 208/4827, Tarver's notes on a tour of the Far East, 17 December 1947.
[17] WO 208/4830, Special intelligence report from A. K. Ferguson (Tokyo), 4 March 1948.
[18] WO 208/4830, Tarver to MI5, 9 February 1948.

this did not prevent them from sharing his information with MI5 who apparently much appreciated this intelligence.[19] Reliance on such sources was not good for the intelligence process in East Asia.

Having internalised such reporting from intelligence assessors, supported by Killearn and MacDonald, the head of the Foreign Office Southeast Asia Department issued a stark assessment of the Cold War situation:

> Reports from a variety of sources make it clear that an important change in Communist policy in South East Asia has taken place during the past few months. The new line [...] is for Communist parties in South East Asia to adopt the same general tactics as they have been employing since 1946 in Western Europe of doing everything possible to undermine and hamper the reconstruction and economic development of the whole area.[20]

This message is significant not only for noting the shift in communist policy towards greater confrontation, but also for adapting the lessons of the Cold War in Europe to Southeast Asia. The idea of a 'new line' became increasingly central to SIFE reporting following the foundation of the Cominform in September 1947. This idea also began to imply a balanced distinction between international inspiration and local impetuses in explaining communist behaviour.

Throughout 1947-48, SIFE were particularly concerned by the activities of international communist cultural organisations and other international contacts. In February 1948, these fears culminated in the Calcutta Youth Conference in India. Although ultimately a damp squib, the communist-inspired conference heightened SIFE's fears of a coordinated anti-colonial thrust.[21]

These activities appeared to constitute a 'new line' shared by communist parties across the region. SIFE summarised the implications of the first stage shortly after a meeting of international communist representatives at Harbin, China, in November 1947:

> The events of recent months have provided evidence that Asia is fast reproducing the salient features of the political division in Europe [...] moderates and their 'liberal' ideas are fast disappearing and compromise is at a discount. As in war the neutrals are moving into alignment or are

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[19] WO 208/4827, Tarver's notes on a tour of the Far East, 17 December 1947.
[20] FO 371/69694, Circular from Paul Grey, 10 May 1948.
[21] CO 537/2650, SIFE Review of Communism, 24 March 1948.

divided by internecine political warfare. Communism is striving to make capital out of a resurgent Asian nationalism.[22]

In this report, SIFE commented that Southeast Asia was succumbing to a situation similar to the Civil War in China. Politics were polarised as communist parties sought to create 'new democratic' coalitions with other anti-colonial movements. These united fronts were expanding communist political influence and enabling communists to hijack or side-line anti-colonial nationalism. However, this was only the beginning of the emergence of the 'new line', which culminated in a rejection of political struggle in favour of violent revolution.

The beginning of the Malayan Emergency in June 1948 was a watermark for both intelligence organisation and intelligence assessment. The start of the communist insurgency emphasised the weakness of local intelligence production, led to greater emphasis on the distinction between internal and international communist influences, and ensured national policy-makers were increasingly engaged with Southeast Asia. The Emergency also led to growing discrepancies between the local and regional-national intelligence communities. In the context of the onset of Britain's Cold War in Southeast Asia, this was most apparent in the different emphasis given to Soviet involvement.

SIFE assessed the outbreak of violence in Malaya within the context of international inspiration. In June 1948, SIFE concluded that 'the present outbreak of industrial unrest, intimidation, assassination and arson in Malaya is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a coordinated communist offensive which is spreading eastward from India'.[23] Their assessment explicitly referenced the Calcutta Youth Conference as the seminal moment in inspiring revolutionary violence. SIFE cited Zhdanov and the Cominform as the key influence in a reorientation of Asian communist parties from constitutional to revolutionary struggle. This was directly linked to European developments. As SIFE phrased it, 'the communist campaign in South-East Asia continues to grow in intensity as the gulf between Russia and the Western Powers widens'.[24]

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[22] CO 537/2650, SIFE Review of Communism, 30 December 1947.
[23] CO 537/2650, SIFE Review of Communism, 24 June 1948.
[24] CO 537/2650, SIFE Review of Communism, 23 July 1948.

Communist violence in the Federation of Malaya posed two linked questions to British intelligence. Firstly, whether this was a deliberate planned revolt by the MCP, and if so, whether it was driven by local policies or international direction. Although failing to foretell the violence, immediately after the event, MSS was confident that it was a centrally planned revolt. They postulated a four-phase scheme beginning with industrial unrest (Singapore in April 1948) and rural terrorism (Malaya in June) followed by attacks on government officials and the seizure of strategic areas. Both of the latter only materialised *after* the government declared a State of Emergency, which would appear to contradict MSS' assertions of a planned revolt.[25] Their interpretation was nonetheless corroborated by GSI branch, where Colonel Grazebrook prepared an interim appreciation on insurgent intentions just three weeks after the first violence. Reliant on information from MSS as well as early interrogations conducted by field units, Grazebrook concluded that the Central Committee of the MCP had planned out an insurgent campaign and undertaken preparations such as dispersing its cells amongst local populations.[26] However, the raw intelligence underpinning these assumptions of central culpability is questionable. There are no such justifications found within MSS reports leading up to the revolt. Indeed, as the historian Calder Walton asserted, 'before the outbreak of the insurgency, Malaya's intelligence machinery was hardly worthy of the name'.[27]

SIFE could not respond to the events of June 1948 with any authority because MSS denied them access to original documents. The local MI5 DSO in Malaya provided a summary which directly contradicted MSS: 'so far as I have been able to ascertain, there is no positive evidence, as apart from logical deductions and reasonable conclusions from events, of the formulation of any detailed plan of offensive by the MCP'.[28] Reports from the DSO were more analytical and incisive than the 'current reportorial' style of SIFE monthly summaries.

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[25] Karl Hack, 'The Origins of the Asian Cold War: Malaya 1948', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 40(3) (2009), 471-496 (p. 489).
[26] WO 208/3931, Grazebrook to Tarver, 7 July 1948.
[27] Walton, *Empire of Secrets*, p. 165.
[28] FCO 141/15439, DSO Malaya and Singapore report for June 1948.

Referring to this problem – deducing the extent to which the communist violence was centrally planned – the imperial historian A. J. Stockwell argued that the MCP may not have intended such rapid escalation. British responses to what could have been purely localised violence contributed to solidifying the insurgent campaign.[29] As Stockwell acknowledged, it is, however, difficult to prove or disprove whether the outbreak of violence was the result of MCP central planning or their lack of discipline over-zealous local branches.[30] For understanding the intelligence community, what matters is how these uncertainties were presented to consumers of intelligence.

There was even less evidence of explicit Soviet direction in Malaya. Rather than actual direction, SIFE postulated considerable ideological influence upon MCP policy reorientation through Zhdanov's 'two camp' theory. This distinction was appreciated by the DSO :

> These facts do not give an impression of a powerful, well-prepared Party poised for an all-out attack to seize power and establish a Communist State and I personally doubt whether this is the objective. To my mind a more reasonable explanation is that MCP leaders have been reminded pointedly of their mild and lagging programme by comparison with those of other Communist Parties in South-East Asia [...] the plan is basically international rather than national.[31]

In contrast, MSS was more credulous of an international communist conspiracy. The Deputy Director wrote that 'there is no reason to suppose that the activities of the Party cannot be part of a world-wide plan as opposed to a local tactical plan'.[32] Dalley suggested that MCP contacts with other communist parties as well as their imitation of Soviet methods implied at least some degree of external direction (not merely ideological influence).[33] The outbreak of the insurgency thus provided for a widening gap between the local and regional intelligence communities. The latter was more effective in disseminating its ideas at the national level, although

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[29] A. J. Stockwell, 'Policing during the Malayan Emergency, 1948-60: Communism, Communalism and Decolonisation', in *Policing and Decolonisation*, ed. by Anderson and Killingray, pp. 105-126 (pp. 109-110).

[30] A. N. Stockwell, '"A Widespread and Long-Concocted Plot to Overthrow Government in Malaya'? The Origins of the Malayan Emergency', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 21(3) (1993), 66-88 (p. 80).

[31] FCO 141/15439, DSO Malaya and Singapore report for June 1948.

[32] CO 537/6006, Dalley's report on internal security, 14 June 1948.

[33] FCO 141/15431, Monthly intelligence review by C. M. J. Kirke, 22 June 1948.

policy-makers chose to publicly adopt an interpretation of Soviet instigation for political reasons.

The more balanced interpretation by MI5 representatives is fairly nuanced. The DSO implied that the MCP made a deliberate decision to escalate confrontation of their own volition. They were not explicitly instructed by the forces of international communism but definitely influenced by the regional and global context, prompting them to act precipitately. Such insight is vindicated by more recent historiography, such as Larisa Efimova's use of the Russian archives to demonstrate that the Soviet Union had no clear Asia policy and was instead focused on watching the situation. It appears that the Kremlin gave local communists only limited rhetorical inspiration rather than any practical instructions.[34] New evidence obtained after the outbreak of the Emergency provided further corroboration. An MCP Central Executive Committee resolution entitled 'The Present Aspect of the International Situation' showed how, in March 1948, the MCP concluded that – in light of international developments – a new approach was needed in the struggle against colonialism and that armed conflict was inevitable.[35]

Back at headquarters, SIFE disseminated this understanding to decision-makers in Singapore and London. SIFE provided government consumers of their intelligence with a succinct timeline showing how local communist parties internalised and acted on Zhdanov's 'two camp' line at different rates, adapting the international angle to local environments. This was based on 'evidence' drawn from their DSOs, MSS and other local allies such as the Burmese police and Indian security services. Most of these raw intelligence producers were predominantly reliant on open sources such as public speeches by communist leaders. These were hardly reliable for evaluating true communist intentions, and the fact that they all conformed to a shared ideological awakening was perhaps not as incisive as was felt at the time.[36] The poverty of sources was a significant concern not just confined to the Far East. It was also a recurring JIC theme in

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[34] Larisa Efimova, 'Did the Soviet Union Instruct Southeast Asian Communists to Revolt? New Russian Evidence on the Calcutta Youth Conference of February 1948', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 40(3) (2009), 449-469 (pp. 449-450, 468).

[35] FCO 141/15439, DSO Malaya and Singapore report for July 1948.

[36] FCO 141/15439, Appendix to SIFE Review of Communism, 23 July 1948.

assessing the threat posed by the Soviet Union during the formative years of the Cold War.[37]

Reflecting this poor quality of sources, JIC(FE) Chairman Patrick Scrivener revealed that there was little direct evidence for the inferences made by the likes of MSS:

> No single document has come to light disclosing any coordinated plans for communist uprisings in the South-East Asia area. There is however no doubt of the source of inspiration for the reorientation of communist policy in South-East Asia: it is manifestly the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, acting through Zhdanov and the Cominform.[38]

This statement corroborates SIFE analysis that Soviet ideological leadership inspired local uprisings but did not specifically instruct them. This is in accord with recent historiographical arguments about the Malayan Emergency. At the time, Cold War decision-makers portrayed the Emergency as the product of direct and explicit orders from Moscow (for very deliberate reasons) which skewed early scholarly analysis. More recently, Karl Hack and other historians have synthesised a post-revisionist argument emphasising the dynamic interaction between local and international factors which retrospectively supports SIFE and JIC(FE) analysis.[39]

The memoirs of the MCP leader, Chin Peng, largely corroborate the interpretation forwarded by SIFE. Chin Peng wrote that, in the final weeks of 1947, the MCP came to regard armed struggle as inevitable but not imminent. However, their outlook was transformed in March 1948. The catalyst was a visit to Singapore of the Australian communist Laurence Sharkey. Meeting the top MCP leadership, Sharkey reported about the Calcutta Conference and current international trends. As Chin Peng noted, the MCP leadership of the late 1940s were all comparatively young and looked to more established communist movements and personalities for inspiration. They also reacted to the increasing crackdown on communist labour activities by the Federation and Singapore

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[37] Cradock, *Know Your Enemy*, pp. 51-52.

[38] FO 371/69695, F 17253/727/61, Note enclosed from Scrivener to Hamlin, 10 November 1948.

[39] Hack, 'The Origins of the Asian Cold War', pp. 479, 482-483; Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain's Asian Empire* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), pp. 415-416; Philip Deery, 'Malaya 1948: Britain's Asian Cold War?', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 9(1) (2007), 29-54 (p. 40).

governments. Balancing these local concerns and international inspiration, the MCP leaders agreed to embark on a policy of armed revolution and began preparations. However, the events of 16 June 1948 were not planned. Chin Peng claimed to be unaware in advance of the rural murders which were conducted by local MCP members. A lack of discipline and excess of zeal within the Party thus prompted the governments to declare an Emergency and forced the MCP to accelerate the timetable of its planned revolution.[40]

If Chin Peng's testimony is truthful, then his account of events would imply that SIFE analysis of events was more incisive than that of MSS. Equally, it would suggest that June 1948 was not as decisive an intelligence failure as practitioners at the time. MSS could have provided better intelligence of the decisions taken in March 1948 and the subsequent communist preparations (which only became known to British intelligence in July 1948). However, they could not have predicted the way events would escalate in June because these were not directly controlled by the MCP central leadership.

However, government consumers of intelligence publicly favoured the conspiracy interpretation. Shortly before the outbreak of violence, Malcolm MacDonald warned listeners to Radio Malaya that 'if the restless, impatient directors of international communism are checked in Europe […] they may plan a political offensive in the East. There is evidence that they have resolved on that policy already'.[41] For historians such as Geoff Wade, these statements marked a turning point as Britain began publicly promoting the idea that Southeast Asia was a new front in the global Cold War.[42] As this analysis has shown, this was a revelation which intelligence officials and their principal consumers had privately taken for granted some months prior. The application of this idea to the public sphere was an attempt to link imperial defence to the escalating international conflict. The inadequate provision of intelligence made it easier for decision-makers to promote a conspiratorial explanation which fitted their colonial and Cold War world-views.[43]

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[40] Chin Peng, *My Side of History* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2003), p. 193, 202-205, 215.
[41] [TNA] FO 953/326, PFE 829/646/96, Transcript of broadcast by MacDonald, 6 June 1948.
[42] Wade, 'The Beginnings of a Cold War', pp. 552-553.
[43] Stockwell, 'A Widespread and Long-Concocted Plot', p. 80.

Within the corridors of power, SIFE appears to have had some influence in shaping official perceptions. At a meeting of the Foreign Office Russia Committee in October 1948, MacDonald explained that the MCP embarked upon revolution 'in the first place [due] to the fact that the Communists generally felt that the "old reformist policy" was losing them ground and secondly, to the South-East Asia Youth Conference in Calcutta'. This implies that MacDonald shared SIFE's interpretation, balancing both local and international factors in understanding the decision to revolt. He also agreed with the DSO and JIC(FE) that the decision for revolution was inspired by international trends but ultimately made by the local communist leadership after receiving ideological guidance from Sharkey.[44] MacDonald further explained how the MCP gradually moved towards violent measures because of the lack of progress in their earlier subversive efforts.[45] This more balanced interpretation was not transmitted publicly because denouncing the MCP as an externally-directed force rallied public support for the government.[46] However, in evaluating the influence of intelligence communities, it is difficult to judge how far MacDonald's interpretation was directly led by SIFE or how far he used SIFE assessments to justify his private views. During the special conference which MacDonald called in June 1947, he had already appeared convinced that the MCP was working towards an eventual power-play by using united front tactics and other means of subversion to destabilise imperial control. MacDonald, therefore, may have independently come to similar conclusions to those which the regional intelligence community later expressed.[47]

This interpretation, which may be termed one of 'Soviet inspiration without direction', was not only the product of security intelligence. It was also shared by the military intelligence community in Singapore. GSI branch concluded that the MCP embarked on the revolt despite poor chances of seizing power in Malaya because they felt the need to conform to the prevailing Cold War ideology begun in Moscow and taken up by other Asian communist parties.[48]

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[44] FO 1110/33, PR 902/71/913, Minutes of the Russia Committee, 14 October 1948.
[45] FO 371/69695, F 15863/727/61, Draft paper by J. H. A. Watson (IRD), 'Communist Strategy in South-East Asia', c. 8 November 1948.
[46] Cheah Boon Kheng, 'The Communist Insurgency in Malaysia, 1948-1989: Was it Due to the Cold War?', in *Cold War Southeast Asia*, ed. by Murfett, pp. 31-49 (p. 31).
[47] Mss Ind Ocn s. 254, Minutes of Governor General's special conference, 26 June 1947.
[48] WO 208/3927, Appreciation of communist intentions and capabilities in Malaya by GSI branch, 4 July 1948.

These views were accepted by MI2 in London, who agreed that the MCP had voluntarily sacrificed its long-term interests in order to demonstrate their loyalty to international communist doctrine. MI2 analysis hypothesised that 'the objective of the insurgents is to create as much chaos as possible in furtherance of a worldwide communist plan directed against the colonial system'.[49] This national military intelligence analysis goes further than SIFE evaluations in attributing responsibility to Soviet central planners, showing the slippery slope of Cold War paranoia within the intelligence process.

The highest forum for national intelligence assessment was the JIC(London). Since 1946, the JIC had been advising policy-makers that communism constituted a serious menace across the world which would only increase unless countermeasures were adopted. This was largely speculative, however, as early JIC reports admitted that they lack informed sources on Soviet intentions.[50] Events in Southeast Asia appeared to justify some of these conclusions. One month after the beginning of the Malayan conflict, the JIC produced a final report on Soviet interests, intentions and capabilities across the world. This report is interesting for emphasising caution in Soviet policy. Although the Kremlin was attributed with a long-term aim of creating a communist world order, they were not expected to take precipitate action. At the national level, British intelligence assessors saw the Soviet Union as seeking to revise the international order from a position of weakness. Southeast Asia was outside the immediate scope of perceived Soviet designs but offered the Kremlin excellent disruptive opportunities against Western empires (repeating the analysis shared by Roberts and Kennan in 1946). The Soviet Union was expected to play little role in Southeast Asian affairs beyond using propaganda and other forms of indirect pressure to encourage greater communist activism and coordination with other anti-colonial movements: two key features of the 'new line' and road towards revolution.[51]

This JIC report shows that, at the highest level of the national intelligence community, consensus emerged that the Soviet role in Southeast Asian affairs was

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[49] WO 208/4834, MI2 brief for Chief of Staff Designate, FARELF, 5 July 1948.
[50] Lomas, *Intelligence, Security and the Attlee Governments*, pp. 56-57, 62.
[51] [British Library] IOR/L/WS/1/1173, JIC(48)9(Final), JIC paper, 'Russian interests, intentions and capabilities', 23 July 1948.

indirect and ideological. This demonstrates a growing unity of view between regional and national intelligence, further suggesting that they can be regarded as a cohesive intelligence community. Following the outbreak of violence in Malaya, Southeast Asian problems became conflated with issues surrounding the global Cold War in Britain's national intelligence efforts. In contrast, at the local level, the intelligence process was beset by collection problems, and intelligence assessors struggled to provide a coherent definition of the communist threat to imperial security.

Reflecting the growing seriousness of the regional situation, from August 1948 SIFE's intelligence reviews were expanded from a Southeast Asia remit to cover the entire Far East. Drawing heavily on these SIFE reports and their annexed 'country studies', the JIC(FE) produced an important paper on 'Communism in the Far East' on 7 October 1948.

As could be expected from what was still a strategically-focused, wartime-influenced body, the JIC(FE) paper examined communism in light of the disruption caused by the war against Japan. It explained that the end of the Second World War left the Far East more vulnerable to communist influence than ever before. European prestige was shattered whereas communist parties could claim a significant part in guerrilla warfare. More materially, they had ferreted away formidable reserves of Allied arms. Asian nationalism was rising against a backdrop of political and economic instability, whilst the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia were increasingly impressed by CCP successes in China. The JIC(FE) concluded that coordination between local communist parties was 'loose but effective'. In India, Malaya and Burma, communist parties decided to move towards violence. They began in similar fashion with self-critical theses which drew upon Zhdanov's ideological concepts. These similarities led the JIC(FE) to the conclusion that these decisions, although independent, were prompted more by consideration of the international situation than purely internal factors.[52]

With regard to the chronology of the regional Cold War, the JIC(FE) also agreed with SIFE. They concluded that the turning point began with Zhdanov's

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[52] FCO 141/15674, JIC(FE)(48)12(Final), JIC(FE) paper, 'Communism in the Far East', 7 October 1948.

foundation speech to the Cominform in September 1947. This speech, which declared that the world was split into two ideological camps and that third parties should choose sides, provided the ideological framework for a reorientation of communist strategy. This was reinforced by personal contacts in Calcutta in February 1948. These meetings allowed for greater ideological coordination. As a result, separate parties in Southeast Asia embarked on revolts in subsequent months: in Burma on 27 March 1948, Malaya on 16 June, and Indonesia on 18 September. The latter, a three-month revolt in Madiun, was triggered by the return of communist leader Muso who had been in exile in the Soviet Union since the 1920s.[53] The JIC(FE) confidently grouped these events as part of a coordinated strategic plan. This was a more advanced Cold War view than that advocated by SIFE. SIFE emphasised the high level of ideological inspiration, but were less convinced that individual revolts were coordinated by Soviet strategists. The Soviets were only directly implicated in the Indonesian affair.[54]

Geoff Wade argued that the Cold War in Southeast Asia properly began in 1949 because of the role of communist China in British calculations.[55] Whilst he is correct that the China factor significantly increased the tempo of British reactions (especially in the metropole), from the perspective of British intelligence officers and policy-makers in Singapore, it would appear that a Cold War was in existence from at least winter 1947-48, based upon assessments of communist behaviour conducted as early as 1946.

The Cold War ideas expressed by SIFE and the JIC(FE) had a proselytising effect not only upon their regional consumers in Singapore but, through the medium of Killearn and MacDonald, also upon the decision-making establishment in London. As aforementioned, the head of the Foreign Office Southeast Asia Department, Paul Grey, took up the idea of a 'new line' whereby communist parties shifted tactics from united front political struggles to revolutionary violence. Grey used this theme to argue for more proactive

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[53] The historian Harry Poeze has suggested that Muso acted as a conduit of the Soviet 'new line' articulated by Zhdanov, but adapted this for the specific circumstances in Indonesia and was also influenced by the success of the Czech communist coup led by Klement Gottwald in February 1948. See: Harry E. Poeze, 'The Cold War in Indonesia, 1948', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 40(3) (2009), 497-517 (p. 506).
[54] FCO 141/15674, JIC(FE)(48)12(Final), JIC(FE) paper, 'Communism in the Far East', 7 October 1948.
[55] Wade, 'The Beginnings of a Cold War', pp. 558-559.

countermeasures. He suggested that the strategy of containment adopted in Europe proved the desirability of a firm attitude in preventing communist expansion. Given that Southeast Asia now appeared to be in the grip of a much more violent Cold War, similar action was increasingly desirable.[56] Consequently, ideas about the need to deal more strongly with communism first expounded by local intelligence officials in the British Military Administration were subsequently taken up by regional intelligence assessors and their governmental consumers, and thus disseminated to national policy-makers. The result of this chain of influence was an increasingly proactive use of clandestine measures to confront communism in Southeast Asia during the 1950s.

Malcolm MacDonald was an important influence in transmitting these interlinked ideas about the emergence of a Cold War and desirability of containment. In 1949, he wrote to the Foreign Office with a 'domino' explanation of the regional position: 'if Indo-China is lost, then Siam and Burma will probably go the same way shortly afterwards. That will bring the power of international communism to the border of Malaya'.[57] The Commissioner General argued that 'it was probably partly because of frustration in the West that the planners of international communist strategy have given more attention to the East'. This view, aired in March 1949, seems different from MacDonald's earlier explanations to the Russia Committee, where he had emphasised the limited, ideological character of Soviet 'direction'. As the regional situation deteriorated, more paranoid ideas of monolithic communism appear to have gathered currency. MacDonald's preferred solution to the growing dilemma was to create Asian equivalents of the Marshall Plan and North Atlantic Treaty to halt communism along the so-called 'upper arc' of Indochina, Burma, Pakistan and Tibet.[58] Eventually these ideas came to partial fruition through the Colombo Plan and SEATO, although these were greatly weaker than their European equivalents. The Colombo Plan was a loose mechanism for bilateral aid packages which began as a

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[56] FO 371/69694, F 6644/727/61, Enclosure to circular from Paul Grey, 10 May 1948: 'New Communist Line in South-East Asia'.
[57] FO 371/75983, F 19106/1055/86, Murray (for MacDonald) to Foreign Office, 19 December 1949.
[58] FO 371/76033, F 4545/1073/61G, MacDonald to Bevin, 23 March 1949.

Commonwealth initiative to inoculate against communism, whilst SEATO never became as united or strong as its European counterpart.[59]

For Foreign Office analysts, the genesis of the 'new line' was simply explained. Agreeing with MacDonald, they postulated that the Soviet Union sought to sabotage the economic recovery of Western Europe by disrupting their colonies in Southeast Asia.[60] As attested by the new Information Research Department (IRD) – set up in 1948 to administer anti-communist propaganda – 'communist developments in S[outh]-E[ast] Asia are of concern to the Foreign Office not only because they present an immediate problem in the defence of our vital interests, but because they fit into the general strategy of the Kremlin in the Cold War against us'.[61] SIFE commented upon IRD's draft paper that they agreed that Moscow was using its ideological influence to spread unrest in the colonial world because they were worried about the balance of power in Europe. In other words, Zhdanov's speech to the Cominform emphasising the 'global nature of the Cold War in September 1947 was a reaction to George Marshall's announcement of United States economic aid to Europe in June 1947.[62] Likewise, military intelligence in Singapore noted how 'there may be little yet to suggest that there is a central controlling influence on communist activities in this part of the world, but it is interesting to note how a general flare-up out here coincided with a check on Russian designs in Berlin'.[63]

Nevertheless, there remained little solid intelligence for the beliefs of certain Foreign Office officials that the Kremlin was materially to blame for the upsurge of revolution in Southeast Asia. In a memorandum of late-September 1948, Paul Grey wrote that 'circumstantial evidence strongly suggests Russian inspiration and guidance in the recent series of communist outbreaks in South-East Asia'. But inspiration and guidance was different from actual direction. Therefore, the ideas generated by SIFE, and transmitted through MacDonald's

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[59] B. R. Tomlinson, '"The Weapons of the Weakened": British Power, Sterling Balances, and the Origins of the Colombo Plan', in *The Transformation of the International Order of Asia: Decolonisation, the Cold War, and the Colombo Plan*, ed. by Shigeru Akita, Gerold Krozewski and Shoichi Watanabe (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 34-49 (pp. 43-44).

[60] FO 371/69694, F 6644/727/61, Minute by W. B. Ledwidge, 10 May 1948.

[61] FO 371/69695, F 15863/727/61, Draft paper by Watson (IRD), 'Communist Strategy in South-East Asia', c. 8 November 1948.

[62] FO 371/69695, F 18120/727/61, SIFE comments on IRD paper, 4 December 1948.

[63] WO 208/3931, Blair to Tarver, 31 August 1948.

visit in October 1948, had some influence on restraining tendencies towards conspiracy theorising. Grey admitted that there was only direct evidence of Soviet instigation in the Indonesian case.[64] Similarly, his department later noted that 'though there is no concrete evidence of direction from Moscow, nevertheless the pattern suggests that communists in South-East Asia are following the Moscow line'.[65] This shows the importance of regional intelligence evaluations in shaping the perceptions of decision-makers in Singapore and London. On the one hand they fostered greater Cold War awareness amongst their consumers; on the other, they helped reign in some of their consumers' wilder assumptions by providing more nuanced understandings of the limited capabilities of the Kremlin.

MacDonald was somewhat ahead of the imperial metropole in assuming the existence of a Cold War in the region. Following the secret conference convened with SIFE and MSS in June 1947, MacDonald and Killearn's deputies composed a scheme for a Special Planning Committee for innovating countermeasures against communist expansion. However, no action was taken because the metropole felt MacDonald's position on the Cold War in Asia was in advance of official policy.[66] By the early 1950s, MacDonald's pressures for a more proactive clandestine approach to the Cold War through propaganda and counter-subversion would embody official policy.

Following the Calcutta Conference, approval was given to the Special Planning Committee. This was created under the chairmanship of MacDonald's Colonial Office deputy, Sir Ralph Hone, and included representation from SIFE, MSS and the defence establishment. On 24 April 1948, the committee produced its sole report which emphasised the importance of counter-communist propaganda and political warfare. This would only become manifest in tangible outcomes from 1949 with the creation of RIO in Singapore as a result of MacDonald's pressures and the global designs of IRD. This is implicit of the potential for intelligence agencies in not only providing assessments to help guide

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[64] FO 371/69695, F 13733/727/61, Memorandum by Paul Grey, 'Communism in South-East Asia', 29 September 1948.
[65] FO 371/69695, F 14002/727/61, Foreign Office minute, 'South-East Asia', c. 7 October 1948.
[66] FCO 141/16949, Report to the BDCC(FE) by Ralph Hone and H. N. Brain, 1 December 1947; FCO 141/16949, Circular from Lloyd (Colonial Office Permanent Under Secretary), 30 March 1948.

decision-makers' perceptions, but also in providing solutions to Cold War problems through covert methods.

The Special Planning Committee was noteworthy for one additional reason. It concluded that there was no direct evidence of contact between local communists and the Soviet Union. But equally, there was no evidence that such connections did not exist.[67] This encapsulates the effect of Cold War paranoia in an intelligence system with endemic collection problems. Because there was no information to deny Soviet direction, it remained a conceptual possibility. Despite the success achieved in creating effective and influential networks of intelligence collation and assessment in Singapore, first-stage production remained the core weakness throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

The parallel evolution of the office of the Commissioner General and the regional intelligence system was highly important for Britain's engagement with the Cold War in Southeast Asia. Although MacDonald lacked executive authority, and intelligence agencies such as SIFE relied upon other organisations for their intake, this new level of bureaucracy enabled intelligence evaluation and dissemination that was qualitatively different from pre-war networks. Firstly, intelligence of all types was now collated across the region, enabling greater analysis of separate events to inform general conclusions (sometimes exaggerated) about communist coordination. Within this system, the nature of the communist threat gave increasing precedence to security intelligence. The JIC(FE) produced biannual reviews of communist activity in the region which showed clear hallmarks of influence from SIFE's more reportorial monthly reviews. These reports fitted both the 'current reportorial' and the 'speculative evaluative' categories. Such reports were the most widely distributed to users of intelligence, and reflected the ultimate distillation of multiple-source assessment in Singapore. Secondly, as became more apparent after 1949, intelligence dissemination was given a greater immediacy. Once SIFE became housed alongside MacDonald in Phoenix Park, the physical distance between intelligence reporters and decision-makers was negligible. In addition, by concentrating regional coordination in Singapore rather than London, Britain's 'tropical

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[67] FCO 141/16949, Report of the Special Planning Committee, 24 April 1948.

Whitehall' benefitted from the perceived advantages of on-the-spot policy evolution. Both intelligence practitioners and their Singapore consumers saw the island city as a 'unique window' on the Southeast Asian situation. This system evolved as a result of Cold War perceptions instilled by intelligence reporting: a system which perpetuated a continued focus on Cold War concerns in regional intelligence direction.

Cold War interpretations thus came to dominate intelligence assessment in Singapore. This did not always imply a monolithic or Soviet-dominated view of communism. SIFE proved effective in putting across a more balanced interpretation which emphasised the interaction between Soviet ideological inspiration and local communist parties' own agendas. This intelligence assessment helped shape policy-makers responses, and, as later chapters elucidate, intelligence agencies could also offer the perfect clandestine solution. Equally, at the national level, the Malayan Emergency prompted a shift from treating problems in Southeast Asia as self-contained to viewing them in the context of the global Cold War.[68] Such an approach is implicit in the inclusion of Southeast Asia in the July 1948 JIC(London) report on Soviet intentions and capabilities, despite the admittance that the region was outside the scope of direct Soviet activities. Ideological influence provided an explanation that enabled greater linkage of events in Europe with those in Southeast Asia, as became increasingly apparent in the minutes of the Foreign Office Southeast Asia Department.

Intelligence collection and local analysis

Decision-makers were primarily guided by the analysis of an increasingly cohesive regional-national intelligence community. They were in turn reliant on sound intelligence collection at the local level. It was well noted by Martin Thomas that 'with such a plethora of intelligence organisations, it was perhaps inevitable that the principal difficulty facing advisory bodies such as the JIC was to collate information quickly into intelligible threat assessments'.[69] For SIFE and

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[68] Goodman, *Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee*, p. 331.
[69] Martin Thomas, 'Processing Decolonisation: British Strategic Analysis of Conflict in Vietnam and Indonesia, 1945-1950', in *Connecting Histories: Decolonisation and the Cold War in*

the JIC(FE) to have any material to evaluate, they needed to liaise with local actors; but their ability to collate material was entirely dependent on raw material being collected in the first place. As aforementioned, their evaluations often relied on open sources as well as captured communist documentation from police raids. Material was collated from across foreign and Commonwealth territories in Southeast Asia, as well as by the Hong Kong Special Branch and MSS. As attested by the indecisive conclusions of intelligence users, initial collection became conspicuous as the key weakness in the intelligence process.

Whilst relations between MSS and the regional intelligence bureaucracy were essentially poor, Colonel Dalley enjoyed good access to certain government consumers, particularly Malcolm MacDonald and Singapore Governor Franklin Gimson. This did not include the Federation High Commissioner Edward Gent or his Commissioner of Police. When MSS came under criticism for not forewarning of the Emergency, Dalley complained that the Federation of Malaya government had refused to furnish administrative support and that the Malayan police did not pass on any intelligence that came into their hands. This left his officers isolated in attempting to recruit secret agents or use surveillance operations: the latter being difficult without assistance from the police infrastructure. Even Dalley believed integration with the police was essential, although unsurprisingly wished to preserve his own headquarters.[70] More junior MSS officers agreed that the separation of intelligence and police was not working, leaving the police without any intelligence expertise to guide their operations, and MSS without any effective conduit for enforcement.[71]

Likewise, MacDonald came to blame the situation of summer 1948 upon the non-cooperation of the Malayan government towards MSS.[72] The Commissioner General supported MSS during the tribulations of 1948 because he had found their reportage useful to his developing anti-communist agenda. When MacDonald convened the special conference on communism on 26 June 1947, Dalley was allowed an important role. Throughout the meeting, Dalley proved

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Southeast Asia, 1945-1962, ed. by Christopher E. Goscha and Christian F. Ostermann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 84-120 (p. 96).

[70] Mss Ind Ocn s. 254, Memorandum by Dalley, 1 July 1948.

[71] NAS 000150, Interview with Ahmad Khan, reel 3.

[72] MAC 16/2/19-21, MacDonald to Creech Jones, 7 September 1949.

much more vocal than H/SIFE Hugh Winterborn, although this was hardly surprising given that the conference was focused upon MSS' jurisdictional area.

Dalley provided the other delegates with a diagram illustrating the different political movements in Malaya and Singapore. This chart explicitly showed Soviet influence playing a directing role over the MCP. Dalley expressed no doubt that the MCP had been in direct contact with Moscow before the Second World War, and that they now enjoyed mediated contact via the CCP. He postulated a chain of influence from the Soviet Union via Manchuria, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Bangkok to Malaya. His emphasis was greatly different from those espoused by SIFE and the JIC(FE) in 1948 which focused on ideological inspiration instead of a direct chain of contact. This marks another discrepancy between the local and regional-national intelligence communities in the field of perceptions and conclusions. It is unsurprising that certain consumers were confused over the state of knowledge possessed by British intelligence agencies.[73]

Although his conclusions were somewhat suspect, Dalley provided a more useful contribution through factual reporting on the current situation in Malaya and Singapore. In the Federation, the MCP controlled approximately 75% of organised labour. Meanwhile, in Singapore, they exercised authority via the Singapore Harbour Labour Union (SHLU). According to an MSS agent, the MCP had a total of 11,800 members across both territories. 11,000 of these members were Chinese, 760 were Indian and the remainder either Malay or Indonesian. The majority of MCP members were in the Federation, with only 925 in Singapore (less than 0.1% of the Singapore population).[74]

MacDonald and Dalley agreed that the first objective of the MCP was to get rid of the government. As in other countries, communists were using united front tactics to hide behind nationalist forces. Their ultimate objective was to set up a communist state. The Trade Union Adviser proclaimed to be friends with individual communists who made no secret of the fact that they waited for him to register unions before proceeding to take them over. Malayan High Commissioner Edward Gent also believed that the MCP fully intended to break down law and

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[73] Mss Ind Ocn s. 254, Minutes of Governor General's special conference, 26 June 1947.
[74] Ibid.

order as a prelude to taking over. He appeared keen to explore the possibility of outlawing the communist party, but MacDonald was not confident they had enough evidence to justify this at that time (and preferred more clandestine countermeasures to public displays of imperialist repression). Instead, he argued they should copy the communists' own tactics and harness non-communist unions and parties against them.[75] If the opinions Gent was espousing at this meeting are truly indicative of his personal stance, it would seem surprising that he was not more cooperative in building an effective local intelligence machine. In such case, the lack of support given to MSS by the Federation government would appear to be less to do with intelligence priorities and more a result of power tensions caused by MSS' anomalous remit and headquarters situated in Singapore.

Although the MSS Political Intelligence Journals lacked coherency and did not give decisive warning of the outbreak of violence which occurred in June 1948, they did comment on escalating industrial unrest promulgated by the MCP in Singapore. This became an open confrontation during a labour dispute involving the SHLU in spring 1948.

The MCP began with the circulation of seditious pamphlets printed in March 1948 which accused the police of acting like 'fascists' by conducting summary executions. During the ensuing crisis, Dalley argued that the MCP made two tactical errors that had left them with 'just about enough rope with which to hang themselves'. Their first mistake was in provoking government action through the seditious pamphlets. This justified the Singapore police in taking action to arrest leading agitators and thus discovering documents proving that the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Union leader decided to call a strike unilaterally in advance of the union's collective decision. This intelligence helped to publicly discredit the strike as a communist political instrument. The government was able to disclose the information provided by MSS which showed that the PMFTU had manipulated the strike without proper consultation.[76] Although Dalley was disappointed that the Colonial Office refused to allow stronger action, this produced the MCP's second tactical error. Their over-confidence prompted them to send the government an inflammatory letter following the banning of a

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[75] Ibid.

[76] For more detail on this event and the role of different communist unions see chapter 3.

communist-organised May Day procession, thus justifying the banning of a planned assembly which the government was previously willing to tolerate. As such, the MCP appeared weak.[77]

By May 1948, effective cooperation between the police, MSS and government in Singapore (contrary to that in the Federation) was successful in deflecting MCP plans for industrial unrest. However, this encouraged Dalley towards some questionable intelligence analysis. For the first part, two days before the outbreak of rural violence in Malaya, Dalley recorded that 'there is no immediate threat to internal security in Malaya although the position is constantly changing and is potentially dangerous'. He expected the MCP to continue to focus on consolidating control of industrial labour before making more decisive moves.[78] Secondly, MSS interpreted the Emergency with greater reference to long-term MCP planning and Soviet direction than regional intelligence assessors.

Although under supervision of SIFE and ultimately responsible to MI5, DSOs were another source of local intelligence analysis. As well as passing information back to SIFE headquarters, they were responsible for guiding the appreciation of security intelligence by the local government in their territory. Their unique position enabled them to combine on-the-spot information obtained by the likes of MSS with MI5 views of the bigger picture. However, it must be remembered that DSOs were not involved directly in raw intelligence collection, and were therefore dependent on colonial agencies for their intake of local information. This is further reason why a rigid distinction between national security intelligence and colonial political intelligence made little sense in the context of the early Cold War outside of power relationships.

In addition to providing analysis of the unfolding Emergency in Malaya and Singapore, the DSO system also gave MI5 an input into local security in Hong Kong. Hong Kong was initially served by a single DSO with one assistant. By the mid-1950s, the MI5 contingent had swelled to four intelligence officers, nine registry staff, two translators and an additional liaison officer embedded within Special Branch.[79] This gives some indication of the importance attached to

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[77] Mss Ind Ocn s. 251, MSS Political Intelligence Journal 8/1948, 30 April 1948.
[78] CO 537/6006, Report by Dalley on internal security in Malaya and Singapore, 14 June 1948.
[79] KV 4/427, SIFE data prepared for the JIC, 15 December 1955.

the colony as an intelligence window on communist Chinese intentions. During the late 1940s, the position of DSO was held by Alan Roger. Because of his links to SIFE and MI5, Roger began applying Cold War preconceptions before more localised intelligence assessors.

This became evident in 1948, when the outbreak of violence across Southeast Asia clearly contrasted with the peaceful situation in Hong Kong. By spring 1948, Roger advised Governor Alexander Grantham of the growing likelihood of a clash between the government and CCP in Hong Kong. The communists were turning the colony into a staging post for 'international communist' intrigue, involving propaganda distribution to Southeast Asia and suspicious visits from Soviet bloc spies. The latter included one Mr A. Pisarevsky believed to be the senior economic intelligence officer of the Shanghai station of the Czechoslovakian Information Bureau.[80]

Following the outbreak of the Malayan Emergency, Roger purported to possess:

> Increased knowledge of the Communist network linking Hong Kong with Europe and America as well as with the countries of South-East Asia, India and North China, penetrating into cultural, welfare and labour organisations and embracing persons of either sex and in every walk of life [81]

Whilst this did not constitute active subversion, Roger believed that if Hong Kong ceased to be of value to the CCP as a point of international contact, they would use all methods possible to disrupt British rule. This was similar to the understanding of Soviet disruptive intentions towards the colonial sphere voiced by the JIC(London) and Foreign Office. However, this was not yet a direct threat to Grantham's government. Instead, the DSO appeared to be guiding Hong Kong towards a tougher position because of concerns centred upon uprisings in Southeast Asia and the belief that the CCP in Hong Kong were a vessel for Soviet influence.

Given the nature of the DSO as a conduit for the SIFE regional picture, it is unsurprising that his reports favoured of international intrigue. What is

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[80] CO 537/2652, DSO Hong Kong monthly report for April 1948.
[81] CO 537/2652, DSO Hong Kong monthly report for July 1948.

interesting is the extent to which this was distanced from the reality in Hong Kong, where the CCP remained cautious. Unlike the communist parties of Southeast Asia, they were careful to avoid provoking the British government. Nevertheless, the Governor agreed with the DSO in attributing communist quiescence not to genuine tolerance for his regime but an appreciation that Hong Kong was a useful opening to the world. Under the status quo, Hong Kong, like Berlin, was a two-way intelligence window. If the CCP provoked the government into suppressive measures, it would be to their own detriment.[82]

Therefore, although Roger's evaluations were of questionable relevance to the local situation, they were not without significance. Insight from MI5 helped interpret the reasons for communist cooperation, shaping the Governor's view that the CCP were acting pragmatically to maintain lines of communication with the outside world. In other words, by giving the communists a safe haven, Hong Kong was weakening the position of other colonies in Southeast Asia. The Governor, like his MI5 advisor, was under no illusions that the CCP would cease to be cautious as soon as the situation became more favourable.

A similar understanding was shared by Grantham's second-in-command, Colonial Secretary David MacDougall. MacDougall was experienced in clandestine work, having spent the Second World War broadcasting grey and black propaganda from San Francisco to Japan.[83] In April 1948, MacDougall summarised the situation:

> Superficially no threat to internal security exists: an atmosphere of complete calm reigns […] But this is never really the case in Hong Kong: inertia exists, but not stability […] The threat to internal security cannot therefore be said to be negligible. Similarly it would be a mistake to say that it was at the present time great: its potentialities are great, but when they will be realised no-one can predict.[84]

These early warnings appeared vindicated by a sudden increase in raw intelligence following the arrest of a communist courier on 6 September 1948. This was not the result of careful planning but a fortuitous accident. Police

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[82] CO 537/3718, Grantham's report on communist and Soviet activities for the six months ending 30 June 1948.
[83] [Bodleian Library], MSS Ind Ocn s. 344, Transcript of Interview with Brigadier David Mercer MacDougall, 26 February 1987, pp. 31-32.
[84] CO 537/2659, MacDougall's appreciation of internal security, 17 April 1948.

officers conducting a routine street search happened upon a suspicious man in possession of CCP documents including secret internal records. However, these were predominantly local directives of very low grade, giving little insight into the CCP's international intentions. The accidental nature of this useful, if limited, intelligence breakthrough is comparable to many of the successes of the Singapore Special Branch in the 1950s which also relied upon routine policing.[85]

The first practical outcome was a coordinated police raid on the home of Lin Kun, identified as Secretary of the CCP South China Bureau. Lin Kun's residence was raided on 11 December 1948, yielding large quantities of new documents. Nevertheless, the majority of the intelligence gained was of little relevance to Hong Kong's national security. Instead, it was more useful as political information for the Foreign Office. One particular diary provided firm corroboration for SIFE suspicions that Hong Kong was a regional directing centre used for liaison with Southeast Asia. It also seemed to imply the ideological orthodoxy of the CCP.[86]

The Foreign Office interpreted the translated material as proving that the CCP was not moderated by 'Chinese' nationalist factors as some had predicted.[87] Since August 1947, the Foreign and Colonial Offices participated in regular Whitehall meetings with the principal intelligence producers including MI5 and SIS. In March 1949, they discussed the Hong Kong Special Branch translations of Lin Kun documents. The Foreign Office appeared convinced that the CCP must be considered an entirely orthodox Marxist party. From assessments of the Lin Kun documents, they believed that in the best case there would be a brief honeymoon period once a Chinese communist government was formed due to its initial weakness. This would soon give way to an 'entirely ruthless' internationalist communist policy.[88]

Following the loss of all Special Branch records during the Japanese occupation, the Lin Kun documents enabled the re-establishment of an

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[85] See chapter six.

[86] CO 537/4814, Translated diary from Lin Kun raid, enclosed in Heathcote-Smith to British Embassy Nanjing, 30 December 1948.

[87] Panagiotis Dimitrakis, *The Secret War for China: Espionage, Revolution and the Rise of Mao* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), p. 261.

[88] KV 4/471, Liddell diary, 5 March 1949.

intelligence registry in Hong Kong. Hong Kong was in a weaker position than Singapore, where the cooperation of former Japanese intelligence officers helped resurrect an intelligence archive in 1945-46.[89] The Lin Kun raid was therefore both a product of earlier intelligence which had highlighted Lin's role as an underground leader, and also an operation designed to collect further intelligence to guide future policy. This scramble for information explicitly highlights the dual role of a Special Branch as an intelligence producer and police enforcer.

In Hong Kong as well as Singapore and Malaya, MI5 networks played an important role in interpreting local security concerns. The DSOs were able to take local intelligence produced by the Special Branch or MSS and contextualise it with the regional picture provided by SIFE. In the case of Hong Kong, this meant the DSO was warning about communist subversion before direct evidence of subversive activity became apparent. The integrated local-regional-national hierarchy provided by MI5 ensured that their interpretation was effective at guiding policy-makers at all three levels.

Summary

Security intelligence was of paramount importance to Britain's adoption of a Cold War posture in Southeast Asia. Intelligence collation and evaluation from SIFE and the JIC(FE) compared the security situation across the region, providing policy-makers with direction on a 'new line' in communist policy. Previously, communist parties had appeared willing to work through political processes everywhere except Indochina. However, from 1947-48, a 'new line' emerged as they firstly attempted to squeeze out opposition and gain political dominance (seen in Singapore during the labour disputes in April-May 1948) before embarking on violent revolution. SIFE helped guide policy-makers in Singapore and London, interpreting these events in a way which emphasised the interaction of local conditions with ideological guidance from Moscow and China.

As a result, intelligence consumers such as Killearn and MacDonald actively adopted Cold War attitudes and policies. Directly referencing SIFE

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[89] CO 537/4814, SIFE report, 'Communism in Hong Kong', 2 February 1949.

guidance, Killearn postulated that decolonisation through transferring power to friendly, non-communist elites could be a way of containing communism. MacDonald agreed, but also emphasised solutions more akin to containment in Europe: ensuring political and economic stability whilst building a defensive perimeter with the cooperation of friendly states. In May 1949, shortly after the inauguration of the North Atlantic Treaty, the Commissioner General garnered the agreement of the Foreign Office Far East Department that 'the object of regional cooperation should be the building of a common front against Russia'.[90] However, little practical progress was made towards this end until the creation of SEATO in 1954. Meanwhile, MacDonald continued to put his faith in intelligence and propaganda services as a means of pursuing more proactive counter-subversion.

MacDonald was ahead of the imperial metropole in assuming the existence of a Southeast Asian Cold War as a solid reality. This can be explained through his closer position to the intelligence cycle, as well as his presence on the ground of regional affairs. This was what British intelligence organisers, their allies and their consumers perceived to be the 'unique window' effect. By autumn 1948, the situation in Malaya ensured that intelligence analysis from Southeast Asia was increasingly important to the national intelligence agenda.

Because of the nature of the threat faced – either revolutionary warfare from communist insurgents or political and labour subversion through more protracted communist campaigns – security intelligence occupied the most crucial position. SIFE evaluations were the main driving force behind JIC(FE) regional summaries of communist activities, which in turn were approved by the JIC(London). This is not to say that local intelligence was not without importance. Although the regional angle was more influential in shaping overall British perceptions and policy, following the dissolution of the moribund MSS, the Singapore Special Branch became increasingly effective at intelligence collection and assessment. As the next chapter shows, this guided decisive action by the Singapore government in preventing the city colony from succumbing to terrorist violence.

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[90] FO 371/76034, F 8338/1075/61G, Minutes of a meeting with Malcolm MacDonald at the Foreign Office, 24 May 1949.

In guiding policy-makers through the origins of a Cold War in Southeast Asia, a number of themes are apparent across the various intelligence networks. Cold War interpretations of local events were dominant, but these were not always the same across all agencies or at all levels. Whilst MSS emphasised a more monolithic view of Soviet communism, regional agencies such as SIFE were more receptive to the balance between local and international factors. The outbreak of the Malayan Emergency prompted greater national interest in Southeast Asia affairs, and intelligence departments as well as their primary users in Singapore contributed to shaping national policy and perceptions. The events of June 1948 were a catalyst in growing divergence between the local and regional-national intelligence communities over intelligence assessment, repeating the trend visible in the field of intelligence organisation. The next chapter considers the impact of the dissolution of MSS upon local intelligence. Although the creation of a new Singapore Special Branch led to improved tactical intelligence production, it also reinforced a distinction between the organisational cultures of the two intelligence communities.

4. Singapore security and communist violence

The spate of murders in rural Malaya on 16 June 1948 had seismic repercussions for the intelligence system in Singapore. For intelligence analysts, the communist insurgency in Malaya was seen as the most dramatic moment in a series of escalations across the region linked with Soviet ideological influence. The regional-national intelligence community guided foreign policy specialists' understanding of this 'new line' and cemented the assumption of the existence of a Cold War in Southeast Asia. June 1948 was no less important for intelligence organisation. Locally, MSS was discredited and replaced with separate Federation of Malaya and Singapore Special Branches which were part of the police infrastructure. Regionally, the escalating spate of insurgencies in Southeast Asia culminated in greater influence for civilian intelligence agencies, particularly SIFE, and growing centralisation within the Commissioner General's new offices at Phoenix Park.

This chapter evaluates the results of June 1948 on the new Singapore Special Branch. Following the disbandment of MSS, the new Federation Special Branch took until the early 1950s to become really effective.[1] However, this was not the case in Singapore, as attested by the first post-war Special Branch director, Nigel Morris. Because of the successes enjoyed by the previous Singapore Special Branch in the 1930s, such as the management of double agent Lai Tek, the Singapore division of MSS inherited greater intelligence expertise than the Federation section. This enabled quicker government action to be taken to prevent an outbreak of mass violence such as occurred in Malaya. Consequently, after the division into two Special Branches in September 1948, the new Singapore intelligence service benefitted from MSS's better record in the city colony.[2] During a period of what may be termed a 'phony war' from 1948-49, the Singapore Special Branch consistently maintained the upper hand. However, the communists regained the initiative with a dramatic wave of terrorist violence, including an assassination attempt on Governor Franklin Gimson in 1950. Nevertheless, by the end of the year, through a combination of good luck and

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[1] KV 4/408, lecture notes by Jack Morton, undated. See also: Leon Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police,* pp. 71-72, 143; Stewart, 'Winning in Malaya', pp. 268-269; Karl Hack, 'British Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency', pp. 124-155.
[2] NAS 001745, Interview with Nigel Morris, reels 5 and 7.

effective tactical intelligence, Special Branch rounded up the highest body of the MCP in the colony. This was not a complete triumph, as taking action against the communist underground necessitated the loss of valuable sources of information, leaving the police in the dark for the next two years.

The Emergency situation in Singapore and its links to the broader Cold War have received little historiographical attention.[3] As well as expanding our understanding of Britain's Cold War intelligence system, this thesis contributes to the body of work on the Malayan Emergency by casting light on British responses to insurgent activity in Singapore. The Emergency dominated colonial governance in Singapore from 1948 until the early 1950s, overshadowing agendas for colonial reform and social development during this period. As attested by Singapore historian C. M. Turnbull, 'the draconian suppression of perceived subversion jammed the lid dangerously tight on a seething cauldron of genuine grievances and injustices […] complicated further by the impact of events in the surrounding region and particularly in China'.[4] Security factors were an important part of Singapore's transitions in the wake of the Second World War.

This chapter evaluates why Singapore remained quieter than Malaya during 1948-49, and how effective the Singapore Special Branch proved in responding to the outbreak of communist violence. During this period, the Singapore government was headed by Governor Franklin Gimson (1946-52). Gimson was a long-standing colonial official who was more representative of the colonial old guard than Commissioner General Malcolm MacDonald. Gimson arguably lacked the initiative or innovation to take a more decisive stance on Singapore's political and security problems. As a result, despite the growing capabilities of Special Branch, the dominant theme of this period – to refer back to Guy Liddell's questionable analogy of nursing – was one of administering cures to outbreaks of communist subversion rather than inoculating against them.

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[3] S. R. Joey Long, 'Bringing the International and Transnational Back In: Singapore, Decolonisation, and the Cold War', in *Singapore in Global History*, ed. by Heng and Aljunied, pp. 215-233 (p. 216, 232).

[4] Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, p. 247.

Containing the Emergency

In the late 1940s, mainland Malaya and Borneo had to contend with nationalist challenges including the opposition to the Malayan Union and the 'anti-cession' movement which opposed the transfer of Sarawak from the Brooke family to the British crown. Communism was not the only challenge to colonial role. In contrast, the MCP was the only significant internal security threat to Singapore. Whilst the communist organisation had been dealt a heavy blow by the Japanese security regime, it survived the Second World War and gained prestige by participating in resistance. Two Party members sat on the Advisory Committee to the British Military Administration from 1945-46, and the MCP operated as a legal political entity until summer 1948. However, the communists were aware that their open organisation was easy for the police to observe, so they also built up a parallel secret structure.[5]

The secret underground was headed by the Singapore Town Committee, in turn responsible through the South Malaya Bureau in Johore to the Central Executive Committee. Meanwhile, in addition to the underground Party structure, the legal MCP organisation was based at 218 Queen Street and nominally led by Cheong Meng Chin.[6] By early 1948, the MCP's visible activities in Singapore operated through a network of front organisations.

The most important front movement was the Singapore Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU): a subsidiary of the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU). The SFTU was an umbrella organisation which included influential unions either dominated or fully controlled by the communists, including the Singapore Harbour Labour Union (SHLU). Moreover, the SFTU also contained an illegal Workers Protection Corps. These dedicated activists used violence and intimidation to enforce discipline within the labour organisation.[7] This was first formed in November 1946, and – in a recurring theme amongst the

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[5] Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution*, pp. 45-49.
[6] FCO 141/15431, Dalley's monthly intelligence review, 6 December 1947.
[7] Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution*, p. 67.

more violent arms of the Singapore MCP – incorporated its membership from criminal secret societies as well as ideologically-motivated communist cadres.[8]

Following a series of strikes in January-February 1946, the MCP Central Executive Committee focused on constitutional progress and peaceful agitation. This was likely due to the influence of Lai Tek, reasserted following initial post-war dislocation, who had been a Special Branch agent before the war. However, after Lai Tek absconded in 1947, wartime guerrilla leader Chin Peng replaced him and urged greater militancy.[9] In 1947 alone, MCP-inspired strikes in Malaya and Singapore cost the two governments 696,036 working days (70% of which were in Singapore). This programme of industrial subversion set the tone for greater confrontation in 1948.[10]

In April 1948, the MCP took advantage of a dispute in the Harbour Board to strengthen their control over organised labour. They controlled 91 out of 159 unions through the SFTU, accounting for 72% of unionised workers. Beyond the numbers, the MI5 DSO was more worried by which unions were members of the SFTU alliance, including the majority of civil service, municipal, infrastructure and harbour unions. They all seemed very much 'eager and able to play the Soviet game'.[11] Such a conglomeration could deliver a crippling blow to the economic and administrative life of Singapore.

On 10 April 1948, Workers Protection Corps members distributed seditious pamphlets levelling false accusations of police brutality. This provided the government with justification to banish eight committee members of the SHLU implicated in conspiring with the militant body. Accurate intelligence received from MSS, according to Governor Franklin Gimson, enabled decisive action.[12] The Singapore police raided the premises of both the SHLU and umbrella SFTU, netting further evidence of the illegal activities of the outlawed Workers Protection Corps. The two raids uncovered a list of Protection Corps

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[8] SOAS, W. L. Blythe papers, PP MS 31/01/17, Extract from MSS Political Intelligence Journal, 31 December 1946.
[9] Lai Tek fled to Bangkok with the MCP's funds. According to the testimony of Chin Peng, Lai was strangled by Thai communist activists when he attempted to resist their efforts to apprehend him. His body – and the money – were never recovered. See: Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police*, p. 50.
[10] Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution*, pp. 53-54.
[11] FCO 141/15439, DSO Singapore report for February 1948.
[12] CO 537/2785, Gimson to Creech Jones, 7 October 1948.

members, enabling their arrest and the curtailing one of the key MCP underground organisations in Singapore.[13] A combination of effective intelligence and police work – absent in Malaya –was instrumental in undermining MCP capabilities from the outset. Unlike in the Federation, the Singapore offices of MSS were based inside the police building and drew upon police personnel. Co-location helped facilitate rapid dissemination of their intelligence and its conversion into effective police action.

The SFTU retaliated through preparing to call a general strike of all its constituent unions on 23 April 1948. However, using information from the intelligence process to justify public policy, the government successfully discredited this as a politically-motivated strike and therefore illegal. Gimson wished to prohibit the SFTU outright, but a more cautious Colonial Office refused permission until after the start of the Emergency.[14] The Singapore government publicised recent intelligence showing that the SFTU had ordered the general strike without consulting its constituent unions, acting at the instruction of its parent body, the PMFTU. The colonial regime argued that this exposed communist manipulation of the labour scene for political ends.[15] Intelligence could therefore be used as a weapon to rally public support for the government, as well as a guide to counter-subversion action. A similar approach was employed by Lee Kuan Yew as Prime Minister of Singapore in 1961. Lee was faced with growing opposition to his support for merger between Singapore and the Federation of Malaya from his former colleague Lim Chin Siong. Lim, who Special Branch had proven to have communist connections, had formed a new party, the Barisan Sosialis, with other expelled members of Lee's People's Action Party. In order to rally public support behind merger, Lee gave a series of twelve radio talks (which he repeated in English, Malay and Mandarin). These were subsequently published under the title *The Battle for Merger*. In these talks and book, Lee disclosed Special Branch intelligence which indicted Lim Chin Siong with being a communist and discredited the Barisan Sosialis.[16] The means by which Special Branch came by this intelligence during the British colonial period

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[13] FCO 141/15434, McKerron to Bourdillon, 19 April 1948.
[14] FCO 141/15434, Creech Jones to McKerron, 22 April 1948.
[15] FCO 141/15439, DSO Malaya and Singapore report for April 1948.
[16] Lee Kuan Yew, *The Battle for Merger*, 2nd edn (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2014), pp. 90-101.

are described in chapter seven. Lee Kuan Yew's public disclosure of this intelligence, repeating the actions of the colonial state from spring 1948, is implicit of an inherited intelligence culture in post-war Singapore in which intelligence could be disclosed to achieve political goals. As seen in the intelligence cycle proposed in chapter one, the intelligence process does not end when assessed material is disseminated to consumers. Rather, those consumers then decide what – if anything – to do with it. In this case, action was taken in the form of public disclosure of intelligence.

In 1961, *The Battle for Merger* was the first logical step on the road to Lee's decision to use Special Branch to arrest the leaders of Barisan Sosialis in a large-scale round-up of 'leftist' opponents in 1963. Throughout the Emergency, the colonial government similarly used the products of intelligence collection and assessment to depict the MCP as adhering to a ruthless revolutionary policy.[17] As seen in the previous chapter with Malcolm MacDonald's public speeches, this sometimes involved portraying a much modified picture to the actual intelligence available. In this regard, claiming to possess 'intelligence' became a useful act of political justification. This alludes to a different way of understanding the impact of intelligence. As well as the bureaucratic and policy impacts referred to in the introduction, intelligence could also have a public impact if public action was taken based upon it. In both 1948 and 1961-63, the selective disclosure of intelligence played a significant role in garnering public support for hard-line government policies.

A combination of MCP mistakes and British successes prevented the outbreak of more serious unrest. The MCP planned two major public events to coincide with May Day (an important communist holiday): a procession and a public assembly. These would be led by the SFTU. Through excessive use of intimidation, the MCP handed the government an excuse to forbid the procession. Then a 'stupidly defiant' letter of protest by the SFTU (to quote the DSO) provided justification to ban the assembly as well. The communists therefore provided an excuse for their own censure.[18]

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[17] One example being the command paper: CO 1030/578, Singapore command paper 33/1957, 'The Communist Threat in Singapore', 23 August 1957.

[18] FCO 141/15439, DSO Malaya and Singapore report for May 1948.

These early signs of a more confrontational MCP stance led to decisive British retaliation in the form of Operation Bulldog. This was a police operation supported by MSS intelligence to arrest and deport anyone connected with the Workers Protection Corps or other MCP underground leaders.[19] Building on the successful partnership shown during the Harbour Board crisis, the intelligence and police services cooperated to clamp down on potential communist activities.

However, the underground sections of the MCP had potential to be more troublesome than its ineffective open front. In May 1948, MCP activists engaged in a campaign of arson, labour intimidation and armed assault in an attempt to cripple Singapore's rubber and tin industry. The most dramatic episode was the burning down of the Bin Seng rubber factory on 10 May.[20] MSS struggled to provide guidance on MCP strategic intentions to match the useful tactical intelligence provided on Workers Protection Corps membership and SFTU activities. Available sources of information did not indicate whether this was another short-term, high-impact campaign conceived as retaliation for the MCP's recent setbacks, or whether it was the start of a more sustained programme of escalation.[21] This pattern was repeated throughout the Emergency in Singapore. Whilst MSS and Special Branch enjoyed many successes in generating tactical intelligence, they often failed to provide a higher level view of MCP intentions and capabilities. As a result, security forces struggled to move beyond a reactive footing.

The first rural attacks in Malaya occurred on 16 June 1948. The Federation government declared a State of Emergency on 18 June. The Singapore government did not follow suit in declaring an Emergency until 24 June. This was potentially because – due to the weaker intelligence picture and lack of MSS-police cooperation in Malaya – the Federation government panicked quicker, whereas the Singapore government was more confident in their ability to retain control.

Shortly after the outbreak of violence, the discredited MSS was replaced by a Special Branch within the Singapore Police. The new Singapore Special

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[19] FCO 141/15431, Special Branch monthly intelligence review, 1 September 1948.
[20] CO 537/4407, Report by R. E. Foulger, 'The Emergency in Singapore', 1 May 1949.
[21] FCO 141/15439, DSO Malaya and Singapore report for May 1948.

Branch began operating under the leadership of experienced police intelligence and MSS veteran Nigel Morris (see table 4.1). In commencing operations, Morris' Special Branch benefitted from the better legacy left behind by MSS in Singapore than the Federation. In the Federation half of MSS, relations with the police were extremely poor. The situation had been better in Singapore where MSS was housed in the CID building and utilised officers seconded by the police. As a result, a discrepancy developed between the effectiveness in intelligence production of the two halves of MSS. This was a problem which the creation of Special Branches only partially solved, as the Federation Special Branch took longer to establish itself than its Singapore counterpart, which inherited a more positive legacy from MSS.[22]

Shortly after the inauguration of the new Special Branch, the government created a Local Intelligence Committee (LIC) which began holding meetings in November 1948 under the chairmanship of a new Secretary for Internal Affairs. This took precedence over a previous intelligence committee chaired by the DSO. The latter body now became the Services Intelligence Liaison Committee (SILC) which met weekly to enable the DSO to apprise service representatives of the contents of the latest Special Branch reports. The retention of the SILC despite the creation of a new LIC shows the importance of MI5, in this case by providing a bridge between civilian and military officials. This was particularly important given the context of the insurgency conflict in Malaya, where growing civil-military intelligence coordination was a vital ingredient to effective counterinsurgency.[23]

Table 4.1. Directors of Singapore Special Branch, 1948-59.

Nigel G. Morris	1948-50
Alan E. G. Blades	1950-57
Khaw Kai Boh	1957-59

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[22] FCO 141/14531, Minutes of an Emergency meeting held at Government House, 5 March 1952.
[23] Hack, 'British Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency', pp. 128-129.

Concurrently, the discredited MSS Political Intelligence Journals were replaced by a fortnightly 'Pan-Malayan Review' which covered both territories. These contained a political section authored by the two Special Branch Directors, and one on security intelligence prepared by the DSOs. This latter section contained more detailed and interpretative analysis of MCP actions than the political section, even though most of the raw intelligence was produced by the Special Branches. These reports can be classified as a meshing together of the 'basic descriptive' types of intelligence report (the political section) and the more analytical 'current reportorial' type (the security section). The role of the DSO in writing these journals further indicates the importance attached to MI5 and SIFE expertise, and a new commitment to making sure earlier turf wars were not repeated. MI5 hegemony over 'security intelligence' was assured. Whilst Special Branches were primarily responsible for intelligence collection, MI5 influence was firmly entrenched over analysis.

On 23 July 1948, the governments of both Singapore and the Federation outlawed the MCP along with some of its key front organisations. Malcolm MacDonald justified this action to the Colonial Office by citing a 'mosaic' of evidence from various intelligence sources which proved beyond doubt that the MCP was directly responsible for the violence in Malaya as well as industrial intimidation in Singapore.[24] Such an interpretation was somewhat questionable and the subject of disagreement between local and regional intelligence organisations. In this case, a more decisive interpretation of intelligence suited the needs of the administration. The SFTU was forcibly de-registered in December 1948. By year's end, the total number of unions owing allegiance to the MCP had fallen from 92 to 56.[25] The intelligence community had already discussed the option of making the MCP illegal once again (as it had been before the Second World War) during MacDonald's special conference in June 1947. However, on that occasion, MacDonald had not felt there was sufficient evidence to publically justify this action. The decision to outlaw the MCP in July 1948 is implicit of the influence of intelligence agencies. The information digested by MacDonald from the likes of MSS and SIFE in June-July 1948 ensured he became confident that

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[24] CO 537/4246, MacDonald to Creech Jones, 22 July 1948.
[25] FCO 141/15667, SILC report, 29 November 1948.

action could be justified against the MCP. This is not to say that intelligence agencies determined his anti-communist policy. After all, MacDonald convened the special conference because he already wanted to curb communist activity and wished to engender discussion between intelligence services and colonial officials. However, a steady stream of intelligence was useful in making decision-makers feel confident to act decisively and be able to carry public opinion behind them.

In response to what they perceived to be a coordinated revolutionary outbreak, the colonial governments in the Federation and Singapore implemented a series of Emergency Regulations. These gave the Governor of Singapore and High Commissioner of the Federation broad powers to introduce sweeping, punitive legislation to curb dissident political activity. The Emergency Regulations allowed the police (which, from September 1948, included the intelligence agency Special Branch) to arrest suspects and detain them indefinitely without trial. Initially there was no oversight beyond the executive branch (the Governor and his Chief Secretary) to curb the police in the implementation of these powers. Suspected communists could be held in detention centres, most notably on St John's Island (previously a disease quarantine centre) without sentencing by jury or judge. The police could also implement targeted searches or large-scale cordon-and-search operations without a warrant.[26]

Although not equal to the insurgent violence in Malaya, the situation in Singapore could hardly be described as calm. Intelligence passed to the Governor suggested that the MCP aimed to expand the Workers Protection Corps and recover from their weakened position.[27] Special Branch quickly identified new activists sent from the Federation. Effective security intelligence – derived from surveillance operations, captured documents and successful agent recruitment – helped keep the Singapore MCP in a state of dislocation for the remainder of 1948.[28] To cite one example, the detention of an insurgent in Johore on 11 September 1948 and their subsequent interrogation enabled the Federation Special Branch to give information to their Singapore counterparts that led to the arrest of

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[26] David Bonner, *Executive Measures, Terrorism and National Security: Have the Rules of the Game Changed?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 142.
[27] CO 537/4246, Gimson to Colonial Office, 14 June 1948.
[28] FCO 141/15431, Special Branch monthly intelligence review, 1 September 1948.

four Workers Protection Corps members, an important MCP liaison officer, an insurgent fighter returning home to Singapore and a communist recruiter.[29]

In the first Pan-Malayan Review, DSO Eric Leighton commented that captured MCP documents bore the unmistakable imprint of Zhdanov's ideological theories. He argued that 'this fact provides additional evidence that the change in MCP policy from "rightist opportunism" to militant opposition forms part of a Soviet inspired plan for South-East Asia'.[30] One MCP propaganda leaflet declared that 'the revolutionary struggle of the people is not isolated. It is a link of the national liberation movement of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples of the Far East. It is also a link in the world revolution'.[31] Regional analysis discussed in the previous chapter therefore played an important role in understanding local intelligence. Whilst historians have debated whether the strong British reaction in June-July 1948 was responsible for solidifying a previously uncertain MCP into a protracted insurgency, it is hardly surprising that decision-makers reacted so strongly given the Cold War context emphasised by their intelligence experts.

New police powers were required. The Commissioner of Police, R. E. Foulger, attributed great importance to the mandatory national registration of all residents over twelve years of age. This provided a registry of everybody legally residing in Singapore which the police could use as the basis for investigations. This system was so effective that it became a key target of MCP disruption efforts.[32] The early successes of arresting suspected communist activists and introducing national registration prompted the MCP to create a new front organisation. This was the Singapore People's Anti-British League (ABL), inaugurated on 1 September 1948. The ABL functioned as a stepping-stone between communist sympathisers and full MCP membership.[33] There was also a Students' ABL managed by MCP youth organiser Guo Ren Huey. The primary duties of both adult and youth ABL representatives were to cultivate new members, solicit donations to support the armed struggle and to distribute propaganda. Once proven trustworthy, they were eligible for full MCP

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[29] FCO 141/15431, Monthly intelligence review by Nigel Morris, 1 October 1948.
[30] CO 537/2660, Pan-Malayan Review of Intelligence, 1 September 1948.
[31] CO 537/2660, Pan-Malayan Review of Intelligence, 15 September 1948.
[32] CO 537/4407, Report by Foulger, 'The Emergency in Singapore', 1 May 1949.
[33] CO 537/2660, Pan-Malayan Review of Intelligence, 13 October 1948.

membership. The creation of this new framework is indicative of the success of British security forces in driving the MCP underground, but also the difficulties this created in keeping tabs on the communist movement. Previously, the MCP had operated a legal office and cultivated members directly. Following suppression, the ABL was needed to maintain contact with the masses and vet new members, symptomatic of the MCP's security dilemmas.[34]

Intelligence received from a reliable Special Branch agent in autumn 1948 confirmed that MCP membership had not fallen greatly since 1947 despite a spate of arrests at the start of the Emergency. There remained approximately 700 full MCP members in Singapore, consisting of 500 Chinese and 200 Indians.[35] Given that the majority of the Singapore population was ethnic Chinese, isolating and identifying communist sympathisers was more difficult than in the Federation, where the security forces relied on coercive population control to achieve success. Such tactics were not possible in Singapore, so timely intelligence and strong policing were of even greater importance.[36]

Nevertheless, intelligence analysis of captured documents was reassuring. The DSO drew attention to how the MCP saw itself as dislocated due to a combination of internal purges of moderate elements who opposed the new militant line compounded by effective police action. The MCP was not planning immediate revolution in Singapore, but focusing on mobilising support for the insurgency in Malaya. Meanwhile, they were reorganising around the Singapore Town Committee and its subsidiary District Committees.[37]

This was confirmed by highly secretive information obtained by Special Branch. This intelligence – an agent's report graded A.2 on the Admiralty scale (see table 4.2) – amounted to a report of a clandestine meeting of the Singapore Town Committee in September 1948. As such documents were not widely distributed, it can be inferred that Special Branch had a well-placed informant. At this time, Special Branch believed that the Town Committee consisted of around

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[34] NAS 000039, Interview with Guo Ren Huey, 1980, reels 7-9.
[35] CO 537/2660, Pan-Malayan Review of Intelligence, 15 September 1948.
[36] Bennett, 'A Very Salutary Effort', p. 417; Karl Hack, '"Iron Claws on Malaya": The Historiography of the Malayan Emergency', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 30(1) (1999), 99-125 (p. 101).
[37] CO 537/2660, Pan-Malayan Review of Intelligence, 15 September 1948.

five or six members. Due to Special Branch successes in identifying and arresting leading MCP members, by November 1948 there appeared to be only two members of the Town Committee still active. The MCP shortly promoted a third member, but the continuing effectiveness of Special Branch in targeting experienced communist activists meant that the MCP struggled to augment its hierarchy in Singapore. The Town Committee never recovered its full strength.[38] This report provides the first link in a chain of evidence suggesting that the Special Branch enjoyed success in penetrating the MCP hierarchy. Although these Special Branch reports were primarily descriptive and contain little analysis, they were rigorous in their evaluation of the reliability of sources (a reminder that these are distinct stages of the assessments process). This rigour is helpful in attempting to understand what sort of human sources Special Branch had access to.

Table 4.2. Admiralty system for intelligence grading, as used by the Federation and Singapore Special Branches.[39]

Source reliability	Information accuracy
A – completely reliable	1 – confirmed
B – usually reliable	2 – probably true
C – fairly reliable	3 – possibly true
D – not usually reliable	4 – doubtfully true
E – unreliable	5 – improbable
F – reliability cannot be judged	6 – accuracy cannot be judged

Another – or perhaps the same – A.2 graded 'very secret source' informed Special Branch that the MCP had no violent plans for Singapore because it needed to rebuild its front organisations. Special Branch Director Nigel Morris believed this agent to be completely reliable.[40] Following government deregistration of the SFTU, the MCP introduced a new labour umbrella, the Singapore All-Races All-Trades General Labour Union (GLU) in 1949. In addition, they intensified propaganda work to attract more sympathisers or ABL members. This campaign

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[38] NAS 000039, Interview with Guo Ren Huey, reel 10; Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution*, p. 67.
[39] Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police*, p. 84.
[40] FCO 141/15431, Monthly intelligence review by Morris, 31 December 1948; FCO 141/15667, SILC report, 3 January 1949.

centred upon a new publication, *Freedom News,* beginning in January 1949 and edited by Students' ABL leader Guo Ren Huey: now promoted to the Singapore Town Committee.[41] Previously *Freedom News* had been the internal propaganda organ of the MCP but from 1949 it became an openly distributed publication printed on a farm in eastern Singapore.[42] Its initial monthly circulation was of 1000 copies.[43]

Nigel Morris firmly believed that only the continued efforts of Special Branch and the police in picking off front leaders as soon as they became active prevented escalation into a more dangerous situation. Operation Bulldog led to a further psychological victory through the seizure of the official seal of the Workers Protection Corps in police raids of October 1948.[44] The director of Special Branch was adamant that 'chaos can only be avoided by firm government control'.[45] In this regard, limited comparisons can be drawn with the situation in the Federation, where government responses during the period of 1948-50 were almost entirely repressive. Only from 1950 did the Federation security regime begin paying equal attention to 'hearts and minds'.[46] Equally in Singapore, policing and intelligence were at the forefront of government responses, and MCP activities were contained through strict Emergency Regulations. The key difference between the situations was that, due to the different nature of the two communist campaigns and the greater success enjoyed by intelligence producers, repressive measures in Singapore were more targeted and entailed less coercion against the population at large.

In the first six months, 304 individuals were detained under Emergency Regulations in Singapore. Only 202 resulted from Special Branch cases. There were 102 detentions resulting from Criminal Investigation Department (CID) cases of arms smugglers, labour agitators and saboteurs who were found to have links to the MCP.[47] This provides further evidence of the importance of involving

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[41] FCO 141/15431, Monthly intelligence review by Morris, 2 April 1949.
[42] NAS 000039, Interview with Guo Ren Huey, reel 11.
[43] Kumar Ramakrishna (ed.), *Freedom News: The Untold Story of the Communist Underground Publication* (Singapore: RSIS, 2008), p. 11.
[44] FCO 141/15667, Singapore Local Intelligence Committee report, 25 October 1948.
[45] FCO 141/15431, Monthly intelligence review by Morris, 2 April 1949.
[46] Bennett, 'A Very Salutary Effort'; Karl Hack, 'The Malayan Emergency as Counter-Insurgency Paradigm', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32(2) (2009), 383-414 (p. 385, 404).
[47] FCO 141/15667, Appendix to SILC report, 20 December 1948.

the police in security intelligence. As well as enabling quick and effective action following Special Branch leads, the new system enabled other police departments to contribute to counter-subversion. The Emergency Regulations also proved to be an effective instrument for more assertive policing of long-standing problems such as criminal secret societies.

The escalating confrontation in spring 1948 set the tempo for the first six months of the Emergency in Singapore. The government maintained a lid on more violent MCP activities through effective coordination between the intelligence and police services. However, despite enjoying numerous small successes, the security forces were as much on the back-foot as they were in the jungle war raging in Malaya. Special Branch intelligence collection was good, but it was primarily tactical. As a result, targeted police enforcement operations tended to be reactive, supplemented by restrictions on political liberties via the Emergency Regulations.

A phony war

By the end of 1948, Special Branch had established an effective system for intelligence production, with indications of successful agent recruitment within the MCP. The fruits of their intelligence were efficiently disseminated. Within the police force, intelligence enabled rapid enforcement action. Secondly, with the assistance of the DSO, it was used to maintain consensus amongst various government departments, defence officials and other intelligence agencies. The work of Special Branch could be classified as both police intelligence and security intelligence. If the latter is defined as information pertaining to the national security of the state, then clearly – despite MI5's dismissals of colonial agencies as 'political' intelligence – this is what Special Branch was doing. The MCP in Singapore was a subversive force which was more than just a threat to the stability of colonial dominance. It sought to establish a communist-inspired regime. By supporting insurgency in the Federation, instigating social unrest in Singapore and preparing for a terrorist campaign, the MCP was a threat to national security and Special Branch was the primary producer of security intelligence to counter this

threat. A distinction between political and security intelligence has little meaning in this context.

The year 1949 was a period of phony war. In contrast to the deteriorating situation in the Federation, security forces retained control through sound tactical intelligence production, analysis and dissemination. The MCP struggled to reacquire the initiative and instead concentrated on rebuilding its underground structure ready for a more explosive campaign of action. A letter from the Governor to the Colonial Office in January 1949 confirmed the existence of an important, well-placed Special Branch agent within the MCP hierarchy. Governor Gimson – a man described by Malcolm MacDonald as politically wise but lacking 'real administrative ability and efficiency' – was reticent about passing on intelligence from this source to his superiors in London.[48] The Governor worried that any leakage could lead to the identification and neutralisation of the agent which would be severely to the detriment of the local intelligence picture.[49]

That relative calm prevailed was in large part testimony to the effectiveness of Special Branch. In addition, SIFE and MI5 contributed advice and access to their global security intelligence pool. This was often achieved through the DSO, whose title was revised to 'Security Liaison Officer' (SLO) in May 1949: seemingly more appropriate for a limited advisory role in the period of decolonisation. In summer 1949, SIFE and MI5 Head Office investigated international opium smuggling networks at the request of Special Branch. Nigel Morris worried that the MCP could be smuggling drugs to fund their activities. Reassuringly, MI5 concluded that there was no reliable evidence of this other than the recovery of $500,000 of opium on the body of an insurgent killed on the Thai border. This could just as easily be individual criminal activity as a communist conspiracy.[50] Despite such help, the influence of the regional-national network on local security affairs was very limited. SIFE and MI5 provided advice when requested, and the SLO helped to disseminate Special Branch intelligence to the armed services, but they were not in the front line of the Emergency. This alludes to two crucial distinctions between the two British intelligence communities in

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[48] Cited in: A. J. Stockwell, 'A Colonial Progress', p. 197.
[49] CO 537/4775, Letter from Gimson to Higham, 19 January 1949.
[50] CO 537/4774, Letter from Busk (MI5) to Morris, 2 September 1949.

Singapore. In terms of priorities, the local community was heavily concentrated on the MCP subversive threat, whilst the regional-national community was more concerned with external influences. As a result, whilst security intelligence was growing in status as one of the most important activities at the regional-national level, local intelligence *was* security intelligence. Moreover, the two communities were distinguished in terms of working cultures. Whilst the regional-national intelligence community was predominantly non-executive (although sometimes used as an avenue for policy instrumentalisation), Special Branch was an integral part of the enforcement process.

The new post of Secretary of Internal Affairs was an important link in the policy-making chain. In May 1949, Major J. C. Barry was appointed to this position, chairing the Local Intelligence Committee. Barry had previously served as a security intelligence officer during the British Military Administration and then in MSS and the police CID.[51] One of his duties was to collate the descriptive reports produced by Special Branch and the SLO for the varying committees and distil these into a more concise analytical report for the Governor. These were named 'political reports' despite discussing security intelligence. Barry's worldviews appear to have been strongly influenced by anti-communism. He even denounced Jehovah's Witnesses as 'a sort of religified [sic] communism with all the worst forms of fanaticism and obscurantism (even discussing them makes one display a similar extravaganza of words)'.[52]

In June 1949, Special Branch obtained an MCP document outlining a three-month plan for Singapore. This entailed increased propaganda, the expansion of the new GLU, and attempts to destroy identity cards to derail national registration. Six persons were arrested for producing counterfeit identity cards which could be used by wanted communists, highlighting the overlap between criminal, political and security issues during the Emergency. Nevertheless, Barry was confident that Special Branch had control and would be able to provide adequate warning of any trouble. He was more concerned with the Immigration Department, which appeared to be the weak link in the security

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[51] The duties of the CID included surveillance of secret societies, gambling suppression, organised crime and anti-narcotics police work.
[52] FCO 141/15628, Singapore political report for August 1949.

chain. In the budget for 1949, the Singapore police was allocated $8,300,000 whilst Immigration received only $260,000. With around 3000 Chinese migrants or visitors flowing in and out of Malaya and Singapore every month, they lacked the resources to conduct more than a semblance of a security check.[53]

The immigration question related to a secondary security threat: the CCP. Barry was increasingly concerned with the potential for Chinese communist bodies to support the local insurgents. By summer 1949, the MCP in Singapore had been reduced to around 200 underground members and 500 sympathisers. Its Indian section was completely broken, leaving the MCP an entirely Chinese organisation. However, front groups loyal to the China-based CCP vied for dominance in the labour, education and cultural fields. Immigration from China had the potential to compound this already complex security situation.[54]

The main instrument of CCP influence was a cultural group called the Mayfair Dramatic and Musical Association. Run by the Shaw brothers, local Chinese cinema entrepreneurs described by Barry as 'notorious Japanese collaborators' and 'shady businessmen', the Mayfair Association conformed to the CCP trend for using theatre to disseminate propaganda.[55]

Barry's report regarding the potential security threat of the CCP caused some confusion in the metropole. Foreign Office officials such as Robert Scott were of the impression that, because there was no formal CCP organisation outside China, the threat to Southeast Asia was purely from national communist parties like the MCP.[56] MI5 Head Office clarified and supported Barry's arguments. They postulated that the CCP wished to persuade overseas Chinese to return to China to support the mainland revolution and could not rely on local parties like the MCP which had conflicting nationalist goals. Therefore the CCP built up independent front organisations in places with a large Chinese diaspora. Their activities had the potential to eclipse the MCP as a future security threat due

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[53] FCO 141/15628, Singapore political report for July 1949; CO 537/5430, Gimson to Creech Jones, 21 February 1949.
[54] FCO 141/15628, Extraordinary security report by J. C. Barry, 19 August 1949; FCO 141/15669, SILC report, 28 November 1949.
[55] FCO 141/15628, Singapore political report for October 1949.
[56] CO 537/4774, Scott to Morris, 24 November 1949.

to the establishment of the communist government in China.[57] This shows how the SIFE regional picture, which emphasised the emergence of the CCP as a strong ideological influence on local communist parties, could be applied to the local level.

SIFE proved a useful ally to Special Branch in investigating international communist influence. In early 1950, an Indonesian Chinese man was arrested in Singapore for not possessing identification papers. His interrogation revealed that he belonged to a training centre in South China for infiltrating subversive agents throughout Southeast Asia. In February 1949, the Hong Kong government had closed down Tat Tak College in the New Territories for contributing to this recruitment process. This case involved local evidence seized from the communist courier arrested in September 1948 as well as international indictments from Indonesia and Indochina obtained through SIFE liaison.[58] The Singapore case proved that this activity was not halted by action against Tat Tak. SIFE helped Special Branch reconstruct this international chain by using their SLOs to institute parallel investigations in Hong Kong and Malaya, as well as liaising with SIS and foreign allies to obtain information from Indonesia and China. On a more quotidian basis, by maintaining a card index of communists from across Southeast Asia, SIFE could quickly supply information to assist Special Branch.[59] Such cooperation across shared intelligence activities (security intelligence) could bridge the gap between the local and regional-national intelligence communities.

Despite these distractions, Special Branch remained focused on the primary security threat – the MCP – and continued to lead decisive police action. On 7 September 1949, the police raided a clandestine meeting of the underground trade union movement. Documents seized during this raid were subjected to analysis by Special Branch and the SLO, appearing to indicate that the MCP was struggling to penetrate legitimate unions.[60] Maintaining constant pressure via

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[57] CO 537/4774, MI5 to Morris, 12 December 1949.
[58] CO 537/4815, Grantham to Creech Jones, 2 April 1949.
[59] WO 208/4835, Report of Far East Military Attaché's Conference, March 1950, Appendix E, lecture by Jack Morton.
[60] FCO 141/15628, Singapore political report for September 1949; FCO 141/15669, SILC report, 19 September 1949.

Operation Bulldog and the Emergency Regulations prevented the new GLU from achieving the same level of dominance as the SFTU had enjoyed in early 1948.[61]

This was following by a more significant raid in November 1949 on a number of connected addresses linked with a property at 96 Duxton Road in Singapore's Chinatown, where MCP propaganda had been discovered in a hidden wall cavity. Eleven young Chinese suspects were arrested, believed to be former members of the New Democratic Youth League who had graduated into the ABL. By the end of the month, connected arrests had risen to a total of 28. As the SLO wryly commented 'until they were separated the CID lock-up reverberated with communist songs'.[62]

During most of 1949 therefore, the trends established in the previous year continued. Successful intelligence production enabled Special Branch to keep a lid on MCP activities. However, they still struggled to deal a more decisive, strategic blow to the MCP underground structure, and relied for their intelligence on ordinary policing methods, surveillance operations, captured documents and a few secret agents or informants.

Emphasising the MCP's retention of the strategic initiative, towards the end of the year, Special Branch discovered the MCP's intention to form a new 'Traitor Assassination Corps'. In British documents this was also referred to as a 'Special Service Corps' or 'Shock Troops'. The establishment of this paramilitary unit, actually a revival of the lapsed Workers Protection Corps which was misnamed and misunderstood in intelligence reports well into the mid-1950s, was part of a new six-month plan for violence. This was the result of instructions from the Central Executive Committee to create unrest in Singapore in order to divert British troops from the Federation. The new 'Special Service Corps' was led by a veteran of the wartime anti-Japanese resistance who was also a member of the Ang Bin Huay triad. This secret society originated in Qing dynasty China and opposed the Manchu rule of the Qing court. It later spread to Southeast Asia through Chinese emigration.[63] Despite evidence from the Singapore Special Branch records suggesting that the Ang Bin Huay allied with the MCP in

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[61] FCO 141/15669, Extract from *The Straits Times*, 'Schools Raided: 3 Held', 26 July 1949.
[62] FCO 141/15669, SILC report, 28 November 1949.
[63] 'Ang Bin Huay Story – by Ex Official', *The Straits Times*, 28 May 1958, p. 5.

Singapore, over the causeway in the Federation, it entered into negotiations with the local Guomindang movement.[64]

According to Singapore Town Committee member Guo Ren Huey, most of the new Workers Protection Corps were recruited from ABL members who had triad connections rather than fully committed communists.[65] As a result, there was a qualitative difference between this new extremist group and the old Workers Protection Corps, which had been totally subservient to the MCP. The alliance with the Ang Bin Huay resulted from negotiations between the triad group and MCP in summer 1949 when the communists sought to take advantage of the triad's networks in the lower strata of the Chinese community. These were carefully monitored by Special Branch Inspector and secret society specialist Khaw Kai Boh who was later promoted to Director.[66]

Hoping to forestall these developments, the police raided an MCP communication centre (parlance for a minor headquarters) on 11 December 1949, and nine days later, arrested two District Committee members as well as two members of the new 'Special Service Corps'. This action had no effect on MCP preparations for a new phase of urban terrorism.[67]

Coping with terrorism

By the start of 1950, Special Branch faced a matured MCP organisation which incorporated an underground party structure, clandestine terrorist elements, and an open united front (see figure 4.1). There were around 250-300 full MCP members left. These were supported by a network of front movements including 580 GLU members, 250 Students ABL members and around 2000 ABL members or more informal sympathisers.[68] Conversely, the Singapore government were confident that the two years of civil and industrial peace they had enjoyed were testament to the success of their intelligence and security machinery. In 1949, a

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[64] C. F. Yong and R. B. McKenna, *The Kuomintang Movement in British Malaya, 1912-1949* (Singapore: NUS Press, 1990), p. 214.
[65] NAS 000039, Interview with Guo Ren Huey, reel 11.
[66] PP MS 31/01/17, Report on MCP-Triad connections by Khaw Kai Boh, 7 June 1949.
[67] FCO 141/15669, SILC report, 19 December 1949; FCO 141/15669, Special Branch weekly summary, 24 December 1949.
[68] FCO 141/15629, Memorandum by Morris, 'Threat to the Security of the Colony', June 1950.

mere 6,612 working days were lost due to strikes in Singapore: in comparison with 492,708 in 1947.[69]


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              Central Executive Committee
                         |
              South Malaya Bureau (Johore)
                         |
              Singapore Town Committee
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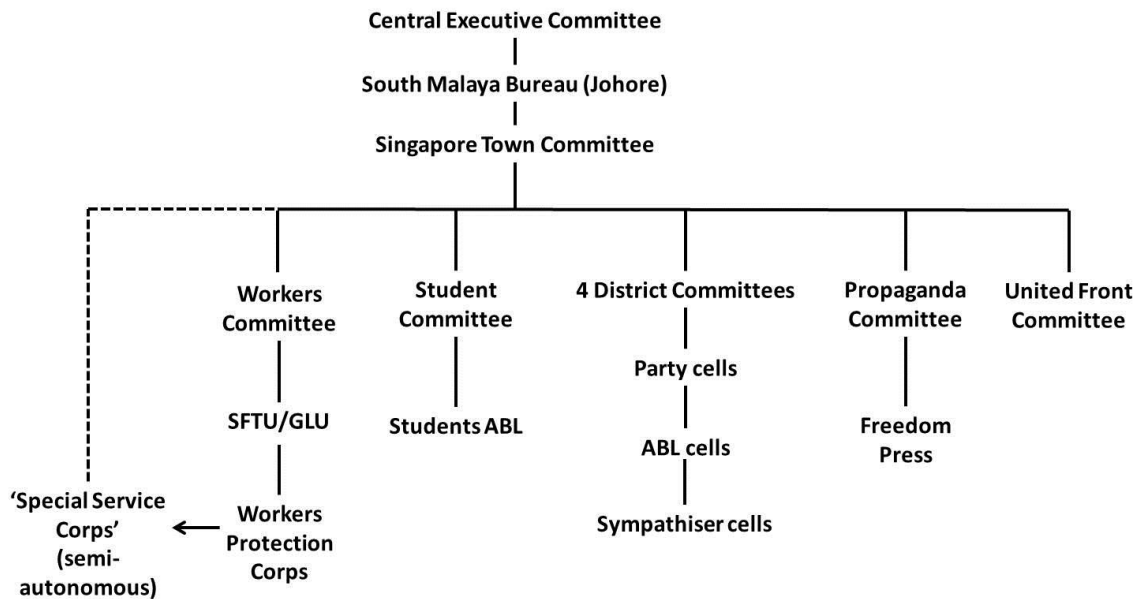
Figure 4.1. Outline MCP organisation in Singapore, 1950.[70]

High-grade intelligence indicated that February 1950 would see the beginning of the MCP's new resolutions to implement widespread sabotage and the assassination of 'Running Dog' collaborators.[71] This intelligence proved extremely accurate, but did not enable precautionary measures. Whilst the dominant theme in 1948-49 was of effective tactical intelligence but little information about MCP strategic intentions, in early 1950, the colonial government had sound intelligence about MCP intentions but less information on how these would be carried out. By the end of the year, security intelligence production reached a peak in effectiveness, but the police sacrificed valuable sources to deal a devastating blow to the communist hierarchy.

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[69] FCO 141/15629, Singapore political report for February 1950.
[70] Adapted from: Chin, 'The United Front Strategy', p. 73.
[71] FCO 141/15629, Singapore political report for January 1950.

With no intelligence forewarning, in February 1950, grenades were thrown into the bus depot and central police yard. This began a campaign of violence which continued for most of the year.[72]

The first significant incident occurred on the evening of 28 April 1950. Governor Franklin Gimson was presiding over an amateur boxing competition at the Happy World leisure park. An assailant attempted to assassinate Gimson by throwing a grenade which bounced off his leg and landed six feet away. The Governor survived because the grenade was defective and exploded with a reduced radius. The press named the assassin 'the man on the 13th step' due to his positioning in the stadium.[73] Gimson described his escape as almost miraculous. If the grenade had exploded properly, he would have perished alongside the Commissioner of Police and local RAF commander. He sincerely doubted whether 'the man on the 13th step' would ever be found.[74]

Such an audacious attack exposed the falsity of the previous two years of calm. Whilst Special Branch had temporarily thrown MCP plans into disarray, they were powerless to prevent the start of urban terrorism due to continuous weaknesses in producing intelligence about forthcoming communist actions. Past police successes, such as the Chinatown raids on propaganda centres, typified the strengths of intelligence production in generating information about communist meeting points and personalities. In response to the assassination attempt, the government introduced new Emergency Regulations levying a mandatory death penalty for manufacturing, carrying or using explosives. Having to resort to increased punitive and preventive measures highlights the extent to which the government felt vulnerable to the new terrorist threat.[75]

In 1948, MSS and Special Branch possessed good tactical intelligence about particular communist organisations and their immediate intentions. This helped to forestall trouble in the harbour dispute. However, they lacked strategic intelligence about the overall intentions and capabilities of the MCP. In early 1950, this situation appeared to be reversed. Special Branch knew in advance of

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[72] FCO 141/15629, Singapore political reports for February and March 1950.
[73] CO 537/5964, Extract from *The Singapore Free Press*, 'Man with Bomb Stood on the 13th Step', 29 April 1950.
[74] CO 537/5964, Gimson to Higham, 1 May 1950.
[75] FCO 141/15629, Singapore political report for April 1950.

the formation of the 'Special Service Corps' and their violent intentions, but lacked specific intelligence which would have enabled them to prevent attacks. Instead, they were left chasing up leads after the event.

The primary reason for this discrepancy became clear in subsequent months. Unlike the old Workers Protection Corps, the new 'Special Service Corps' was acting semi-autonomously from the MCP hierarchy and thus outside the knowledge of Special Branch agents. After the assassination attempt on Gimson, terrorist incidents became more impulsive and − according to Singapore MCP leader Guo Ren Huey − were outside the knowledge of the Town Committee. In addition, they were not always perpetrated by the actual 'Special Service Corps'. In one incident, an individual Students' ABL member attacked the headmistress of the Nanyang Girls' School with acid. This was not part of the MCP plan of campaign but shows an escalating spiral of grassroots violence inspired by the high-profile attack on the Governor.[76] Compounding the difficulties facing Special Branch, it was becoming increasingly difficult to recruit reliable informers as a result of the threat of retaliation against 'running dogs'. Public help to the police was rarely forthcoming.[77] Special Branch was forced to rely on surveillance operations and investigative procedures more associated with criminal policing.

Nevertheless, Special Branch quickly adapted and − although unable to prevent further incidents − established an impressive record of responding to them. Two days after the assassination attempt, they rounded up the Governor's assailant, who was also implicated in a grenade attack against the Adelphi Hotel. The would-be assassin, identified as a man named Tan Aik Chok in intelligence shared through SIFE with the American CIA, was found along with eight other high-ranking MCP members in a raid on an underground trade union centre at Lorong 33 in the Geylang district (an area better known as a long-standing centre of vice).[78] The sharing of this intelligence alludes to another connection between

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[76] NAS 000039, Interview with Guo Ren Huey, reel 11; PP MS 31/01/36, Minute by W. L. Blythe about CID monthly crime reports for 1950, undated.
[77] FCO 141/15629, Memorandum by Morris, 'Threat to the Security of the Colony', June 1950.
[78] CIA Crest records, CIA-RDP82-00457R005000630002-9, CIA report, 'Arrest of Members of the MCP Singapore Town Committee', 20 June 1950
<   https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp82-00457r005000630002-9>
[accessed online 7 October 2018].

the local and regional-national intelligence communities. The latter was able to share local intelligence with foreign allies and keep them abreast of developments in Singapore. CIA reports from 1950 suggest a lag-time of around two months for intelligence to be processed by Special Branch, disseminated across the British intelligence community, shared with, and reported upon by their American allies. According to Special Branch Chinese section head John Fairbairn, they were running at a lag time of approximately one week for translating MCP documentation which fell into their hands.[79]

All of those arrested were China-born rather than locally-born. Such a fact was of great interest to the colonial government given their attempts to classify the Singapore Chinese population based upon their local or foreign origins and draw links between birthplace, descent and loyalty.[80] One of them was a young woman who proved to be a member of the Singapore Town Committee.[81] However, unwilling to compromise intelligence sources, the government struggled to find publicly disclosable evidence with which to prosecute those arrested.[82] In addition, the Lorong 33 raid involved sacrificing important inside sources on the MCP. The government later reflected that this left them in the dark and without continuing up-to-date intelligence for the rest of the year and beyond. [83] This would imply that one of those brought in during the Lorong 33 arrests was a Special Branch agent, or that the security of their agent was otherwise compromised through this action.

Although enjoying some successes against the MCP underground and front movements, security organisations remained powerless to prevent an escalating spiral of terrorist acts. Whilst the 'Special Service Corps' had been hampered by poor quality arms and explosives during their early attacks, through developing an aptitude for improvisation they achieved greater success. On 17 July 1950, an arson attempt was perpetrated against the Aik Hoe rubber factory using an improvised incendiary device which utilised an ordinary incense stick as the fuse. Aik Hoe had been founded by the entrepreneur Tan Lark Sye in 1925,

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[79] CO 953/9/7, Fairbairn to Wiltshire (Singapore CID), 10 August 1950.
[80] See chapter 1.
[81] FCO 141/15671, SILC report, 15 August 1950.
[82] CO 537/6008, Gimson to Higham, 1 May 1950.
[83] CO 1022/59, Memorandum by Blythe, 'Emergency Legislation and the Emergency in Singapore', 10 December 1951.

and rose to its position as one of the biggest rubber enterprises in Singapore by taking advantage of the Great Depression which ruined many longer-established businesses. Following the 'Korean War boom' in rubber prices, the Aik Hoe Company became one of the world's leading rubber traders in the 1950s and 1960s.[84] Over the following days, similar devices were used against the Singapore Improvement Trust offices, Michelin rubber factory and Louis Dreyfus rubber godown. Only prompt action by the fire brigade prevented all these attempts from being successful.[85]

Fundamentally, their inability to procure intelligence to prevent terrorist incidents made it look as if the British were losing control. This became apparent on 27 July 1950 when a second attempt succeeded in burning down the Aik Hoe factory, causing an estimated $12,000,000 (or £1,400,000) worth of damage. The following day, whilst the police regained some initiative by arresting four suspected arsonists, another terrorist boarded a bus in broad daylight and shot Li Chi Hoa, the Chinese Inspector of Schools, for his collaboration with the government. Li survived, but the impact on public morale was clearly felt.[86] Police protection was extended to prominent Chinese individuals who had been criticised by MCP propaganda.[87]

As well as undermining public morale and damaging capitalist interests, industrial attacks were of direct financial benefit to the MCP. The Town Committee helped obtain funds for the MCP campaign in Malaya through extortion rackets. Following the destruction of the Aik Hoe factory, other businessmen paid protection money to prevent attacks on their premises. Although this deviated from Central Executive Committee instructions to focus attacks on British interests rather than Singaporean Chinese businessmen, it proved a lucrative strategy.[88]

Special Branch had foreknowledge that Aik Ho was a major communist target. The Lorong 33 raid in April 1950 uncovered what Gimson termed an MCP

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[84] Hong Liu and Sin-Kiong Wong, *Singapore Chinese Society in Transition: Business, Politics and Socio-Economic Change, 1945-1965* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), p. 217
[85] FCO 141/15671, SILC report, 22 July 1950.
[86] [TNA], CO 953/9/7, Extract from *The Daily Telegraph*, '4 Held after Singapore Rubber Fire', 29 July 1950; FCO 141/15671, SILC report, 29 July 1950.
[87] FCO 141/15671, SILC report, 15 August 1950.
[88] NAS 000039, Interview with Guo Ren Huey, reel 13.

'master plan' of sabotage and terrorism which included Aik Hoe (albeit giving only a general outline without specific details due to the independence of the 'Special Service Corps'). Despite repeated tip-offs from the police, the factory owners refused to improve security. Thus even when Special Branch did produce intelligence forewarning of planned attacks, they struggled to enact preventive measures due to the intransigence of private citizens.[89] Tan Lark Sye's refusal to heed Special Branch warnings generated suspicions amongst the United States. A CIA report from September 1950 repeated rumours from local business circles that Tan had deliberately allowed the attack to cover potentially fraudulent business activities (Tan was suspected of selling rubber which was already consigned to export shipments at cut prices to Chinese friends).[90]

The MCP continued to possess the initiative through subsequent weeks. On the night of 30 August, two police constables were held up and had their pistols stolen. This appeared to be an attempt to rectify the MCP's perennial difficulty in procuring weapons and ammunition. More worryingly, the RAF airbase at Seletar reported the theft of over one thousand friction tubes: a device which ignited the charge of three inch signal mortars. In view of the 'Special Service Corps' proficiency with improvised incendiary devices, these could easily be used as bomb detonators.[91] Meanwhile, communists sabotaged the Rediffusion broadcasting company installations in support of a labour dispute, and engaged in widespread taxi burning in an attempt to cripple the city's transport.[92] In October, a traffic policeman was assassinated by three Chinese assailants and a special constable was shot in his home. Special Branch became convinced that the 'Special Service Corps' had been granted total freedom of action by the Town Committee in executing the 'master plan' uncovered at Lorong 33 any way they saw fit. Such independence was probable given that the Corps drew its membership from criminal secret societies as well as MCP members (although this was not yet known by Special Branch in 1950). The semi-independence of the 'Special Service Corps' was used by Special Branch as explanation for why they

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[89] FCO 141/15671, Gimson to Griffiths, 28 July 1950.

[90] CIA Crest records, CIA-RDP82-00457R005800680012-5, CIA report, 'Tan Lark Sye and the Aik Hoe Rubbr Factory Fire', 28 September 1950 https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp82-00457r005800680012-5 [accessed online 7 October 2018].

[91] FCO 141/15671, SILC report, 12 September 1950.

[92] FCO 141/15629, Singapore political report for September 1950.

struggled to get prior intelligence of attacks, implying that the MCP hierarchy was penetrated and that they would have known more if the Singapore Town Committee had been directly involved.[93]

The violence which erupted in 1950 casts further light on the nature and significance of the security intelligence machine. In contrast to previous years, Special Branch enjoyed more success in generating general intelligence about the new campaign than tactical information about specific attacks. This was largely because of the nature of the new organisation involved, the reformulated Workers Protection Corps (or 'Special Service Corps') which combined communist activists and triad members. The nature of intelligence produced by Special Branch in this period further supports the conclusion that they had penetrated the communist hierarchy at a high level. The MCP attacks, denounced as 'terrorist' incidents by the colonial government, further emphasised the dominance of the Emergency upon colonial rule in the late 1940s and early 1950s. As well as the security field, labour and education were seen as battlegrounds against communist subversive influence. The confrontation with communism permeated many aspects of Singapore politics and society during this period. Whilst Special Branch remained primarily responsible for confronting the MCP, the seriousness of the struggle meant that MI5 and SIFE were increasingly consulted, and even foreign intelligence partners such as the CIA took an interest in local developments in Singapore.

Pyrrhic victory

Whilst struggling to control the violent terrorist campaign, Special Branch steadily accumulated intelligence leading to the destruction of the Singapore Town Committee in December 1950. Special Branch possessed at least one highly placed agent, possibly a member of the Town Committee itself. Given the importance attached to certain intelligence reports and their nature (reports on highly secretive Town Committee meetings) this would seem likely. However, the action taken in rounding up important MCP leaders in April 1950 involved the

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[93] FCO 141/15671, SILC report, 24 October 1950.

sacrifice of at least some of these sources, hindering intelligence production over subsequent years.

By spring 1950, the Town Committee had only three members. Its secretary was Ah Kim, a man who had fought in the communist-organised resistance during the Second World War and had links to the Ang Bin Huay triad. Ah Hia was responsible for Party organisation and the united front movements. She was arrested in the raid on Lorong 33 on 30 April 1950 and banished to China. Finally, Guo Ren Huey, editor of *Freedom News*, held authority over propaganda and the Students' ABL and had been recently promoted to Town Committee status. The arrest of Ah Hia left the Town Committee with only two members: Ah Kim and Guo Ren Huey. Because of the stringent Central Executive Committee rules on the length of service required for a member to be promoted to Town Committee level, in addition to the success of the police in picking off leading MCP members, they were unable to find suitable replacements.[94] This is implicit of the deterrent effect of good intelligence. As suggested by Special Branch director Nigel Morris (promoted to Commissioner of Police in later 1950), the MCP were reluctant to send high-ranking members from Malaya to Singapore because of the proven effectiveness of Operation Bulldog.[95]

Further confirmation of penetration of the MCP can be found in a series of heated exchanges between SIFE and the Singapore government. At the end of April, a document was obtained by an important Special Branch agent which indicated that MCP internal discipline was in disarray. This was believed to be an internal memorandum distributed very narrowly within the Party.[96] The Singapore government sent a translated copy direct to the Colonial Office and implied in their covering letter that SIFE had approved their actions. In fact, H/SIFE Jack Morton strongly disapproved and took serious umbrage with this violation of the proper lines of communication for intelligence dissemination. To safeguard such important sources as well as to ensure proper assessment to contextualise the raw information, it was SIFE's responsibility to collate intelligence from local Special Branches and pass it on to MI5 Head Office, who could then provide evaluation

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[94] NAS 000039, Interview with Guo Ren Huey, reel 11.
[95] NAS 001745, Interview with Nigel Morris, reel 7.
[96] CO 537/6008, G. R. Savage (SIFE) to Sillitoe, 26 April 1950.

of the material to government departments in London. It was not the duty of Special Branch or the Singapore government to communicate intelligence directly to the metropole.[97] Morton's critique is reminiscent of the dispute between SIFE and MSS. Although seeming to acknowledge that Special Branch was producing security intelligence, SIFE were insistent that they were the proper authority for providing assessment of such intelligence. This was the same distinction between collection and assessment implied through the organisation of the Pan-Malayan Reviews.

The Governor promptly back-tracked and blamed Special Branch director Nigel Morris for the indiscretion. Somewhat patronisingly (and implausibly), the Governor stated that Morris didn't realise the dangers in departing from procedures to protect agent's identities. In this instance, the limited distribution of the document meant that, if the MCP discovered it had fallen into British hands, they may have been able to discover who was responsible. Gimson described that much of the current intelligence difficulty arose because a previously valuable Special Branch agent had been blown and had to evacuated from Singapore.[98]

Moreover, in September 1950, during a particularly active period of violent attacks, Gimson informed his superiors that Special Branch agents who had penetrated the 'innermost circles' of the Singapore communist movement had recently been discharged from their positions of trust. Special Branch was confident that this was not because their agents' covers had been blown, but simply because they had been demoted for inefficiency.[99] In November 1950, Special Branch received a handwritten document reporting the recent decision of the Singapore Town Committee to improve its own security measures. This document revealed that the MCP leaders in Singapore were in the grip of an espionage panic, fearing infiltration by 'secret service men, running dogs and spies'. They decided to embark on a major reinvestigation of the background and loyalty of all Party members whilst introducing tougher vetting for new

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[97] CO 537/6008, Morton to Gimson, 2 June 1950.
[98] CO 537/6008, Gimson to Higham, 6 June 1950.
[99] CO 537/6008, Gimson to Higham, 28 September 1950.

recruits.[100] Taken together, these incidents suggest that, during the course of 1949-50, Special Branch had repeated success in penetrating the MCP.

Ultimately, the terrorist campaign of 1950 proved self-destructive for the MCP organisation in Singapore, as it forced Special Branch to move from long-term surveillance operations to punitive enforcement by rounding up communist leaders. Moreover, by bringing Party operations into the public sphere, they increased the likelihood of compromising Party secrecy, making it easier for Special Branch to gain information on MCP activities. Assassination attempts were also made against Special Branch officers who were identified because the families of detainees in the Special Branch lock-up at Robinson Road took note of car registration numbers when visiting. This only increased the zeal of Special Branch in smashing the MCP.[101]

On 12 November 1950, the police raided an important communist propaganda centre on Arang Road near the Singapore waterfront. This produced an escalating spiral of successful raids against MCP hideouts. Intelligence accrued during the Arang Road raid helped Special Branch to locate and arrest the remaining two members of the Singapore Town Committee. On 5 December 1950, Ah Kim asked Guo Ren Huey to rendezvous outside the Thong Chai Medical Institution (a long-standing philanthropic enterprise in the heart of Chinatown) with a courier from the District Committees. After meeting the courier, Guo was arrested by three Special Branch detectives. The following day, Ah Kim was arrested at the same location whilst waiting for a contact who did not show up.[102]

The exact circumstances by which Special Branch achieved this momentous success are unclear from the present evidence. Counterinsurgency expert and historian Richard Clutterbuck suggested that it was the result of an alert detective spotting the first suspicious exchange by chance and tailing Guo before arresting him.[103] Singapore's Colonial Secretary (the Governor's chief

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[100] CO 537/6008, Handwritten MCP document, 'Notification No. 6 of Singapore Town Committee regarding Decision to Intensify the Secrecy of Party Organisation', translated by Singapore Special Branch, 16 November 1950.

[101] NAS 000039, Interview with Guo Ren Huey, reel 13.

[102] NAS 000039, Interview with Guo Ren Huey, reel 14.

[103] Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution*, p. 71.

deputy) W. L. Blythe noted that the arrest of the Town Committee was brought about not by planned, long-term intelligence operations but an 'unexpected windfall'.[104] However, Guo Ren Huey himself offered a contradictory explanation which – if correct – would indicate greater success for Special Branch in maintaining consistent penetration of the MCP.

Guo recounted that, in early 1950, the Singapore Town Committee re-admitted a former member – whom he named as one Sin Ah – who had been moved to a different position within the Party earlier in the Emergency. However, MCP sympathisers planted within the Special Branch headquarters discovered that Town Committee records had fallen into the hands of Special Branch detectives. Sin Ah was suspected of this treachery and suspended, but further action was not taken against him because the arrest of the remaining Town Committee occurred whilst they were still gathering evidence. The demotion of Sin Ah could correspond with the loss of important agents related by Gimson in September 1950.[105] Guo's testimony could be reliable because, following his arrest in December 1950, he defected to Special Branch and for the remainder of his career hunted down his former comrades as a British (and later Singaporean) intelligence officer.[106] Other Special Branch reports written in December 1950 state that the arrests were the result of tip-offs from two independent sources (although this is more likely to mean casual informer testimony than the result of agent penetration).[107]

Without more reliable or authoritative evidence, at most it can be said that Special Branch were able to achieve a significant breakthrough, probably through a combination of good intelligence and good luck. This devastating blow effectively severed all contact between Singapore communists and the MCP Southern Bureau in Johore, and left the various front organisations without any coordinated leadership.[108] Despite the attempts of the MCP to disrupt orderly

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[104] CO 1022/59, Memorandum by Blythe, 'Emergency Legislation and the Emergency in Singapore', 10 December 1951.

[105] NAS 000039, Interview with Guo Ren Huey, reel 15.

[106] Thum Ping Tjin, 'The Old Normal is the New Normal', in *Hard Choices: Challenging the Singapore Consensus*, ed. by Donald Low and Sudhir Thomas Vadaketh (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013), pp. 139-167 (pp. 157-158).

[107] FCO 141/15671, SILC report, 12 December 1950; FCO 141/15671, Special Branch weekly summary, 16 December 1950.

[108] FCO 141/15671, SILC report, 12 December 1950.

government through a terrorist campaign in 1950, the year ended with Special Branch triumphant. The round-up of the Town Committee was testament to over two years of efficient tactical intelligence production, despite some mishaps along the way. However, as with the arrests of April 1950, it proved to be a pyrrhic victory. As chapter six elaborates, Special Branch actions against the Town Committee left them without inside sources as the MCP reorganised its underground networks in 1951-52.

However, persuading the arrested Guo Ren Huey (and possibly Ah Kim) to defect and continue working for Special Branch was a further achievement for Special Branch. As remembered by Fong Chong Pik, then an MCP propagandist on the run from security forces, 'as I knew then, following the complete destruction of the underground Town Committee, its secretary and some members became turncoats, acting as enemy agents to attack the underground organisation'.[109] As well as using inside knowledge to better direct police operations, Guo's defection had a psychological impact on his former comrades who it appears were well aware that their organisation was repeatedly hindered by Special Branch penetration agents and defectors.[110]

The timing with which Special Branch struck their decisive blow was fortuitous. From 11-13 December, Singapore succumbed to widespread riots by the Malay Muslim community. These were in protest at a court case over a young girl named Maria Hertogh, who had been abandoned by her Dutch parents during the war and raised by a Malay Muslim family. The Singapore courts ruled that Maria should be returned to her biological parents. The riots which ensued led to the murder of seven Europeans and Eurasians, and the police appeared powerless to respond. Order was only restored by massive intervention from the British armed forces, laying bare the sheer vulnerability of the colonial system and its reliance on the use of force.[111] The successes of Special Branch in keeping a lid on communist activities alluded to the nature of intelligence as a force multiplier

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[109] Fong, *Memoirs of a Malayan Communist Revolutionary*, p. 102.

[110] Whilst it appears that Guo continued working for Special Branch in the long term, the status of Ah Kim is less certain. Special Branch records show that after four months in custody he agreed to cooperate and divulge information in April 1950, but his subsequent history is unclear. See: FCO 141/15660, Special Branch weekly summary, 28 April 1951.

[111] Aljunied, *Colonialism, Violence and Muslims in Southeast Asia: The Maria Hertogh Controversy and its Aftermath* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 22.

or 'insurance policy' (as termed by the regional JIC) and Singapore as something akin to an intelligence state. Both national security and colonial stability depended upon good intelligence.[112] In contrast, the December 1950 riots seemed to suggest that Singapore was less an intelligence state and more a police state where the ultimate source of control remained the military.

The Maria Hertogh riots led to various investigations by the British government into decision-making and policing in Singapore. In addition to a number of published reports, Hong Kong Police Commissioner Duncan MacIntosh was seconded to Singapore to prepare a top secret, highly critical review of the direction of police and intelligence work. MacIntosh wrote that:

> There has been an imprudent atmosphere of complacency derived from absence of active Chinese communist inspired incidents. The whole attention of the Force has been focused upon potential Chinese terrorist acts to the neglect of other potentials of unrest and disorder, which are equally dangerous either by themselves or by communist exacerbation and exploitation.[113]

The accuracy of some of these statements can be questioned. The year 1950 saw a severe escalation in MCP acts of violence, so it was natural that these dominated the agenda. MacIntosh entirely ignored these facts, seeking to place blame on the police and certain members of the colonial government rather than explore broader contradictions and tensions in Singapore's complex society.

Although the overall police and colonial administration had failed during the Maria Hertogh riots and received justified criticism, MacIntosh's review of police intelligence appears entirely unfair. The success enjoyed by Special Branch against the MCP helped prevent more serious disturbances. During the riots, the MCP failed to capitalise upon the disorder. A lavishly-redacted SIFE report postulated that this was because of the recent arrest of the remaining Town Committee. By the 14 December, the MCP got around to distributing some 40 posters but that was the extent of their involvement.[114] Through dislocating the

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[112] CO 537/2653, JIC(FE)(48)7(Final), JIC(FE) report, 'Lessons on the Organisation of Intelligence in the Far East', 15 July 1948.
[113] CO 537/7244, Report on the Singapore police by D. W. MacIntosh, 26 December 1950.
[114] FCO 141/14424, SIFE memorandum, 'Singapore Riots', annex to JIC(FE)(51)3(Final), 9 January 1951.

communist underground organisation in Singapore, Special Branch helped to forestall an MCP attempt to take advantage of the situation.

The historian Syed Aljunied suggested that, as a result of the Maria Hertogh riots, 'the basic assumption that all threats emanated from foreign agencies whose sole object was the displacement of British colonial rule and that subversive activities in Singapore posed only minor threats to the security of the island were suddenly shattered and rendered obsolete'. He argued that this incident was a watershed in establishing a tighter system of colonial security and more effective counter-subversion methods.[115] The applicability of this assertion is questionable. In the records of British security intelligence – most only made available following the release of the Migrated Archives – there does not appear to be any basic assumption that all security threats were essentially foreign. Indeed, intelligence agencies debated whether a potential foreign threat (the CCP) was as relevant as the currently existing local threat (the MCP). Perhaps a more accurate summary would be that the Maria Hertogh riots reminded policy-makers that communism was not the only potentially subversive force.[116] Yet after the riots – centred upon the Malay population – died down, it was the predominantly Chinse MCP which remained the major security threat, even whilst Britain prepared to compromise with legitimate nationalists.

To suggest that an improvement in intelligence and police work resulted directly from the Hertogh riots is similarly erroneous. As demonstrated by the evidence accumulated in this chapter, the Singapore police operated effectively against the threat of gradual MCP subversion in 1948-49, and also regained control after the outbreak of terrorist activities in 1950. The assassination attempt upon Governor Franklin Gimson was a more pertinent turning point, as this triggered a switch from a cautious Special Branch accumulating intelligence on the underground MCP to a proactive Special Branch leading police raids to stamp out the communist hierarchy. In this regard, the greatest significance of the Hertogh riots was in bringing debates surrounding colonial security into the

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[115] Aljunied, *Colonialism, Violence and Muslims in Southeast Asia*, p. 46.
[116] Both Aljunied and Richard Stockwell are correct in suggesting that Special Branch focused on communism to the detriment of other potential threats – but given the events of 1950 this is hardly surprising. See: A. J. Stockwell, 'Imperial Security and Moslem Militancy, with Special Reference to the Hertogh Riots in Singapore (December 1950)', *Journal of Southeast Asia Studies*, 17(2) (1986), 322-335.

limelight of the corridors of Whitehall and Singapore public sphere. In the clandestine world of security intelligence, Singapore already had a well-oiled machine in the form of the Special Branch and advice from MI5.

Summary

Intelligence production played a significant part in Singapore's post-war development. In contrast to the situation in Malaya, the Singapore Special Branch proved effective at producing timely and actionable tactical intelligence on the MCP. This enabled coordinated enforcement operations which prevented the colony from succumbing to communist violence. The maintenance of public order throughout most of the post-war years was in large part due to the effectiveness of the intelligence machine.

Special Branch success can be distilled to just a few reasons. One of the most important was the legacy of previous successes. Nigel Morris, Alan Blades and other officers had strong experience in security intelligence from the 1930s, when they had proven their effectiveness against both the MCP and Japanese espionage. The Singapore branch of MSS and later the Singapore Special Branch inherited this intelligence expertise which the Federation Special Branch lacked. They also benefitted from the cooperation of the Kempeitai in 1945-46. Consequently, it was not until the early 1950s that security intelligence in the Federation of Malaya started to catch up with Singapore.[117] Another element was the momentum of success. Picking off MCP leaders in Operation Bulldog during 1948 and 1949 deterred the MCP from reinforcing the Singapore Town Committee or District Committees during the critical year of 1950. Special Branch capitalised on both their intelligence legacy and momentum of success by achieving agent penetration of the MCP. However, this was not just a story of success. Special Branch struggled to produce tactical and strategic intelligence on the MCP threat at any one time, and their enforcement efforts were largely reactive. Until the arrest of the Town Committee in December 1950, the MCP set the tempo of the struggle.

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[117] Stewart, 'Winning in Malaya', p. 269.

MCP mis-calculation cannot be ignored. The terrorist campaign of 1950 was mandated by the Central Executive Committee not to achieve anything in Singapore but to divert British attention away from Malaya. However, it shocked the public, strengthened government resolve and brought the MCP's underground struggle into the open arena where it was more easily targeted by Special Branch. In contrast, security forces acted judiciously and left the MCP dislocated during a crucial moment in Singapore's history: the Maria Hertogh riots of December 1950.

Intelligence organisation played some role in this success. The position of Special Branch within the police enabled rapid and efficient dissemination of their intelligence. Information was transmitted not just to policy-makers whose perceptions they could shape but also to other police departments which could help bring about action. In addition, unlike MSS, Special Branch developed a sound working relationship with MI5 and SIFE. The SLO for Singapore helped to coordinate civil-military intelligence relations and provided an alternative avenue for intelligence analysis with links to MI5's global intelligence pool. As subsequent chapters show, this became even more important due to decolonisation concerns, with MI5, SIFE and Special Branch able to pool resources to better understand emerging local politicians.

On balance, there remains a useful distinction to be made between the local and regional-national intelligence communities. They differed in priorities, organisational models and working cultures. The internal situation in Singapore was very much the reserve of the local intelligence community. At higher levels, interest in local affairs was mostly prompted by dramatic events such as the Aik Hoe arson, Gimson assassination attempt or Maria Hertogh riots. Nevertheless, these two intelligence communities were not entirely separate, and shared activities such as security intelligence ensured that they frequently cooperated, with bodies such as SIFE and MI5 penetrating advisors into the local level. Special Branch officer Ahmad Khan later described their working relationship as 'hand in glove': a stark contrast to the unhelpful bureaucratic conflict which had festered between MI5 and MSS.[118]

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[118] NAS 000150, Interview with Ahmad Khan, reel 5.

Part 2

The expanding Cold War, 1950-1955

5. Cold War concerns and intelligence innovations

The early to mid-1950s transformed the Cold War in Asia. In Southeast Asia, the conflict in Indochina led to the creation of North and South Vietnam in 1954. Escalating tensions encouraged weakening colonial powers and their Dominions (France, Great Britain, the United States, Australia and New Zealand) to forge a new alliance with selected Asian nations (Laos, the Philippines and Thailand). The Manila Pact of September 1954 created the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation. In the British territories, progress was finally made in the Malayan Emergency under General Gerald Templer who served as civil and military supremo from 1952-54. In 1957, Malaya became an independent nation under the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman. Across the causeway in Singapore, a new constitution gave an enlarged voice to locally elected representatives in 1955. The first Chief Minister, David Marshall, was an inconsistent supporter of counter-subversion initiatives. His replacement from 1956, Lim Yew Hock, was firmly allied to British goals. Meanwhile, in East Asia, the formal creation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in October 1949 heralded a new threat to British economic and strategic interests. The Korean War of 1950-53 carried the risk of escalation into general war with China.

The same period was equally transformative for British intelligence. This chapter evaluates how the regional-national intelligence community responded to the changing Cold War. Britain's key foreign policy goal was, as Malcolm MacDonald had voiced in 1948-49, to promote a non-communist buffer zone between North Vietnam and China and the British colonies of Singapore and the Federation of Malaya. However, this was a period in which British power and prestige were in decline. Even within its strategic stronghold of Singapore, Britain was increasingly forced to negotiate with local politicians. It was also a period of continuing economic pressures. Therefore, the British government was unwilling to enter into major overt commitments in the Southeast Asian Cold War and were already questioning their existing defence commitments in Asia.[1] They were equally worried about provoking a more aggressive stance from the PRC which would threaten Hong Kong.

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[1] Long, *Safe for Decolonisation*, p. 131.

Consequently, secret services became increasingly significant to Britain's Cold War in Southeast Asia. The growing complexity of Cold War problems required more diverse avenues for intelligence processing. Greater attention was paid to open source and propaganda intelligence, although more entrenched activities and agencies such as JIC strategic intelligence, SIS foreign intelligence and SIFE security intelligence retained their position of prominence. As well as providing assessments, the regional-national intelligence community also began to play a more proactive role in implementing Cold War policy. One avenue for achieving this was through propaganda and covert action; another was through intelligence diplomacy with other regional powers. This work, referred to by Philip Murphy as the 'missionary' side of intelligence, proved more effective in building alignments and exporting a particular intelligence culture than it did at channelling new information back to Singapore.[2]

This chapter explores how the regional-national intelligence community met these new challenges and sought to advance British goals in a manner appropriate to declining capabilities. It begins by examining the growing integration between agencies and activities within the regional-national intelligence community, before investigating intelligence activities linked with the situation in Southeast Asia and China. Nevertheless, despite some success in helping to advance British goals, this community struggled to resolve its information collection problems.

Strengthening the intelligence community

A key factor in the regional activities of British intelligence was the increasing coordination between different agencies and activities in Singapore. The divisive turf wars of 1948 were largely resolved by 1949. However, a number of problems remained. Perhaps the greatest of these was the poor stream of raw intelligence reaching collation and assessments centres. This was greatest with regard to China. The solution to both lingering bureaucratic resentments and the collection problem was seen to be engendering greater cooperation within the British intelligence system.

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[2] Murphy, 'Creating a Commonwealth Intelligence Culture', p. 138.

Intelligence consumers played a significant role in trying to foster better coordination. From 1950, the Commissioner General began hosting biannual conferences at his official residence, Bukit Serene, to discuss Cold War developments with British representatives from across the Far East. The first meeting, which MacDonald referred to as his 'Cold War Committee', was held on 22 August 1950. MacDonald used this occasion to champion his belief in the need for more proactive counter-subversion and counter-communist efforts, particularly through propaganda.[3] This period also saw growing correlation between the world-views of the metropolitan government and Phoenix Park. Following a series of ministerial exchanges in autumn 1955, the Prime Minister agreed to a more active 'counter-subversion' policy, very broadly defined as including propaganda and covert action, by the intelligence services.[4] This is implicit of regional-national unity on the view that countering communist subversion was not just a defensive security concern but required taking the initiative. To do this, intelligence services needed to work together in pursuit of Britain's foreign policy goals.

In his December 1952 Cold War conference, MacDonald theorised that a third phase had opened in the Far Eastern Cold War. Intelligence from London and Singapore indicated that communist parties were moving away from insurgency tactics in some areas and that the Soviet Union and China were exhibiting feelers towards peaceful coexistence. In Southeast Asia, he predicted that this third phase would be characterised by communist propaganda offensives and political infiltration. This was a retreat from the first phase (of constitutional struggle from 1945-47) and second phase (of revolutionary violence from 1948-52). In this new phase, it was more important than ever to strengthen Britain's response through intelligence and covert propaganda. Consequently, MacDonald was a strong voice in support of the relatively youthful RIO as well as entrenched services such as SIFE.[5]

However, SIFE found their direction relationships with London more challenging. During the tenure of Jack Morton (a former DSO Baghdad) as

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[3] MAC 18/3/2, Circular from MacDonald, 8 August 1950; MAC 18/9/38-46, Minutes of the Bukit Serene Conference, 22 August 1950.
[4] [TNA], PREM 11/1582, Minute by the Foreign Secretary, 19 October 1955.
[5] MAC 18/5/20, MacDonald to Foreign Office, 9 December 1952.

H/SIFE from 1949-52, staffing levels peaked at 65.[6] This started to become an issue from summer 1953, by which point Morton had been replaced by Courtenay Young. Young was a Cambridge Chinese graduate who joined MI5 in 1941 and later served as SLO to one of SIFE's key partners, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). Young advised Australia on the creation of ASIO, and as SLO continued to work with his Australian colleagues in implementing tougher protective security and counterespionage.[7] With this experience as well as previous service in SIFE behind him, Young was a genuine regional expert, unlike several previous appointees.

Between 1953 and 1956, pressures from user departments in London and Singapore forced H/SIFE to think seriously about economies. MacDonald's new Foreign Office deputy argued that SIFE's functions could mostly be done by MI5 Head Office. Young defended his organisation by explaining that as long as there was a Commissioner General they would need security intelligence advice. But since the continued existence of Phoenix Park was thrown into doubt at the end of MacDonald's much-extended appointment in 1955, this was not a stable position.[8] By the end of Young's tenure in 1955, there were still 51 persons working for SIFE despite various attempts at reform.[9] This was approximately one third of the total number of MI5 officers working across the Empire and Commonwealth.[10]

Against this backdrop, the Foreign Office Permanent Under-Secretary Ivone Kirkpatrick denounced Singapore as 'full of intelligence officers… a slough of despond in South-East Asia'. Whilst there was no immediate ultimatum, Kirkpatrick strongly suggested to the new Director-General, Sir Dick White, that MI5 relate their future planning to the probable disappearance of the Commissioner General. Moreover, Kirkpatrick made it clear that the British government favoured intelligence collation done in London.[11] This linked the fate of SIFE not only with the Commissioner-General but also its sister organisation SIME. Cabinet Secretary Norman Brook and JIC(London) Chairman Patrick Dean

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[6] KV 4/424, Morton to Sillitoe, 3 November 1951.
[7] KV 4/424, Liddell to Lloyd (Colonial Office), 8 April 1952; Horner, *The Spy Catchers*, p. 171.
[8] KV 4/425, Young to John Shaw (MI5), 25 July 1953.
[9] KV 4/427, SIFE employment data prepared for JIC, 15 December 1955.
[10] KV 4/426, Note of discussion between White and Kirkpatrick, 13 January 1955.
[11] KV 4/426, Note of discussion between White and Kirkpatrick, 13 January 1955.

were convinced that large regional collation centres were outdated. SIME was slowly wound down by 1958.[12]

However, SIFE survived after it was decided to retain the position of Commissioner General due to the new SEATO alliance. Because of its adaptability and continued utility to the changing priorities of the Commissioner General, SIFE was spared. SIME was simply less relevant due to deteriorating British influence in its region. In contrast, SIFE experienced rejuvenated importance to the execution of Britain's Cold War and decolonisation imperatives in Southeast Asia. Although departing his office as Commissioner General, Malcolm MacDonald remained a crucial supporter. In London, he explained that SIFE's regionalist approach was vital to underpinning Britain's overt diplomatic activities.[13] Unlike the central Foreign Office and its mouthpieces in Singapore, the more maverick MacDonald – who had become very close to his intelligence advisors – was fully convinced of the 'unique window' argument. His rationale, based upon how intelligence could support foreign policy goals, is revealing of the crucial reason why this interpretation dominated despite recurring problems in intelligence collection.

In October 1955, Singapore gained a new Commissioner General. MacDonald's replacement was Sir Robert Heatlie Scott, an experienced Foreign Office Asia hand and Whitehall mover who had briefly chaired the JIC(FE) in 1947. Whilst MacDonald had been the personal representative of the British monarch and retained his Cabinet rank, Scott was only accorded the rank of Ambassador. This symbolised the reality that Scott's coordinating activities were increasingly focused on the Foreign Office side. The Colonial Office had been willing to terminate the post, but the creation of SEATO and tense situation in Vietnam required somebody to coordinate Britain's foreign policy.[14]

Scott quickly outlined his own vision for Phoenix Park. He envisaged a slimmed down but more coherent grouping of the intelligence and defence arms.[15] Regarding SIFE, Scott agreed with the Foreign Office that much of their collation

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[12] KV 4/427, White to Thistlethwaite, 31 August 1955.

[13] KV 4/427, White's record of meeting with Malcolm MacDonald, 9 July 1955.

[14] CO 1030/193, Minute by Sir Norman Brook, 13 May 1955; CO 1030/194, Extract from *The Times*, 'Sir R. Scott in Singapore', 12 October 1955.

[15] FCO 141/14832, Final record of Commissioner General's conference, 19 December 1955.

and analysis could be done back in London. This was a rejection of the standard 'unique window' view that analysis could be improved by some sort of imperialist cultural immersion. However, SIFE could add value to Britain's Cold War by helping to improve the local security machine ready for independence and building partnerships to provide for continued British influence in Southeast Asia.[16]

SIFE also gained a new director in 1955. This was Richard ('Dick') Thistlethwaite, who had previously served with security intelligence in Iran during the wartime occupation before being appointed MI5 representative in Palestine and later the United States.[17]. Thistlethwaite and Scott enjoyed a remarkable degree of shared priorities, and reinvigorated the crucial partnership between SIFE and the Commissioner General. Thistlethwaite himself questioned the relevance of a large assessments staff as the training and liaison functions of SIFE were becoming more important than its actual intelligence reporting. The very purpose of regional intelligence was in flux. Although foreign intelligence remained a significant imperative in light of the Vietnamese and Chinese situations, this was more the purview of SIS. The security situation was stabilising as communist insurgencies were on the decline. Therefore, Thistlethwaite saw a shift in SIFE's focus away from reportage towards building new relationships with Asian nations.[18] Due to the creation of SEATO, H/SIFE played an enlarged role as a regional expert on counter-subversion. Thus by adapting to the changing environment, SIFE remained on the front line of the Cold War.[19] Ultimately, SIFE continued in existence for as long as the post of Commissioner-General until 1963. This is testament to the indispensability of the former to the latter.

Despite some success in adapting to Britain's revised priorities, the intelligence system retained its major flaw. Raw production was the critical weakness. Partly this was because of inadequacies internal to local producers, but it also resulted from the existence of a plethora of separate bureaucracies. The most striking case was the complex relationship between MI5 and SIS.

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[16] KV 4/427, Note by White on conversation with Scott, 11 July 1955.
[17] MAC 20/1/61, Circular from Secretary of State for the Colonies, undated.
[18] KV 4/427, Memorandum by Thistlethwaite, 'SIFE's Future', 30 September 1955.
[19] KV 4/428, Thistlethwaite to Hollis, 14 August 1956.

Talks between MI5 and SIS resulted in the establishment of a combined sub-section in Singapore, the Joint Intelligence Division (JID). This remained administratively part of SIFE, succeeding the old counter-intelligence 'B' section, but was headed by successive SIS officers. The JID assumed responsibility for directing collection requirements for SIS field posts, security intelligence collation and training local security services.[20]

This regional change was part of shifting patterns of national intelligence organisation. From 1948, MI5 and SIS were locked in discussions about overseas representation and jurisdictional boundaries. MI5 wished to secure representation in foreign territories such as Thailand to direct more security intelligence towards SIFE. Only Burma had representation by both SIS officers and an MI5 SLO. This proved to be one of the more successful SIS centres in the Far East during the early Cold War, drawing on shared experience to penetrate of local insurgent movements.[21] Guy Liddell reflected that this was the only non-British territory in Southeast Asia providing reasonably good intelligence.[22] The success of this model was a major impetus in SIFE attempts to secure joint representation in other nations. These talks were paired with discussions on who should conduct relations with overseas security services, which threatened to drag on interminably throughout 1949.[23]

In the end, progress was made not in London but in Singapore where H/SIFE and the Far East Controller agreed upon dual representation in neighbouring countries. To appease SIS headquarters, MI5 also had to integrate their regional collation centre with the counterintelligence sections of the SIS regional controller, creating the JID.[24] By this point, relations were becoming more acrimonious. One SIS officer told Liddell that 'C' (the Chief of SIS) was always sniping at MI5, accusing them of 'trying to extend our tentacles too far'.[25]

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[20] KV 4/424, Revised SIFE internal review, 12 May 1952.
[21] Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 705.
[22] KV 4/470, Liddell diary, 29 December 1948; KV 4/474, Liddell diary, 26 April 1952.
[23] KV 4/471, Liddell diary, 4 February 1949.
[24] KV 4/471, Liddell diary, 23 February 1949.
[25] KV 4/471, Liddell diary, 17 March 1949.

In return, Liddell noted that SIS 'had manifestly failed to give us any information of any value about communist activities in China, or in the Far East'.[26]

The JID was a solution to two problems. On the one hand, it bolstered SIFE's position within the intelligence hierarchy through combining the political capital of MI5 and SIS. As Liddell noted one year after its creation, 'there seems little doubt that SIFE is now very firmly established, and even something of a Power in the Land'.[27] By pooling foreign and security intelligence resources, the status of both was significantly bolstered.

Secondly, the JID was intended to improve SIFE's intake of intelligence. SIFE was providing analysis of Cold War developments based on a relative dearth of sources. In Malaya they had access to captured MCP documents, but only if the local Special Branch was willing to cooperate. From the outset, however, SIFE had conceptualised its own value in terms of combining information from British and foreign territories. The JID was supposed to streamline this process and achieve SIFE's core aims.

Little information has been declassified as to the details of JID activity. One sparse insight is provided by H/SIFE Courtenay Young's annual review from June 1953. Young described progress made by officers in 'B' section (SIFE parlance for the JID, see figure 5.1) since he assumed office a year previously. The B.2 China desk produced a directory of all known PRC officials in Southeast Asia. They also took control of the interrogation of two Chinese defectors, 'Good Gamble' and 'Besom'. Major Stevens, whose remit as B.4 included the Soviet bloc intelligence services, collated information on Soviet and Czechoslovakian intelligence activity in the region. Information he provided enabled four defector operations to be launched against Soviet personnel during 1952-53, although all proved abortive.[28]

As figure 5.1 shows, the creation of the JID transformed SIFE organisation. Alex Kellar had established a functional structure in 1949 with desks dealing with thematic issues such as nationalism and international communism.

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[26] KV 4/471, Liddell diary, 12 October 1949.
[27] KV 4/473, Liddell diary, 9 August 1951.
[28] KV 4/425, Young to Shaw, 23 June 1953.

This was scrapped in favour of a more territorial division of labour. This is indicative of the importance of improving the intake of raw intelligence, as this structure was better suited to liaising with local producers and directing collection processes. However, metropolitan intelligence directors and user departments began to worry that SIFE was moving away from its collation remit and straying too far into raw intelligence production. The JID merger had the potential to blur the boundaries between foreign and security intelligence. This could be negative, by potentially reducing SIFE's focus, but also positive, by bringing to light information of mutual interest.
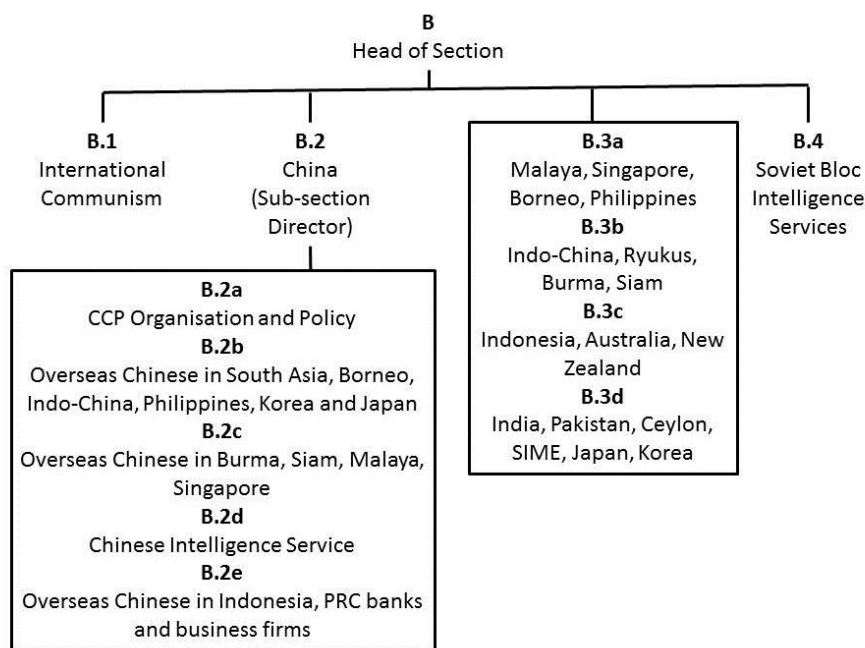
Figure 5.1. Territorial organisation of the JID (SIFE 'B' Section) in September 1953.[29]

Having overcome the bureaucratic tensions of the 1940s, the regional intelligence milieu was increasingly centralised. This was conducted through the physical relocation into the Commissioner General's complex at Phoenix Park. It was also evident through less tangible improvements in relationships. Regional intelligence staved off economising pressures by articulating its continued relevance to foreign policy goals. Moreover, the strengthening of a regional-

[29] KV 4/425, Memorandum by Young, 'The Basic Problem of SIFE Area Posts', 25 September 1953.

national intelligence community can be inferred from these interactions. As the Cold War escalated and changed, metropolitan and regional decision-makers were increasingly aligned in their priorities and policies, particularly in the belief that intelligence and covert activities could provide a solution to their problems. Whilst raw information collection remained a critical weakness, despite the creation of the JID, a more centralised intelligence community was better equipped to move beyond assessments and support the active pursuit of policy as mandated by both Malcolm MacDonald and Whitehall.

The China quandary

The foundation of the PRC on 1 October 1949 posed new dilemmas to British intelligence in the Far East. They now faced not only communist insurgencies across Southeast Asia, but also a revolutionary communist state at the epicentre of the Far East. Communist China was not only a strategic threat. It was also a security challenge. Most states in Southeast Asia, but in particular the British colonies, had significant Chinese populations. In Singapore itself, the Chinese diaspora constituted over 80% of the population (see table 5.1). It was expected that these populations would become increasingly vulnerable to the spread of communism as the prestige of the PRC grew.

Table 5.1. Chinese diaspora as percentage of total population, 1952.[30]

Singapore	80%
Malaya	45%
Sarawak	26%
North Borneo	20%
Thailand	17%
Indochina	5%
Indonesia	3%
Burma	1.5%
Philippines	1.25%

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[30] CO 1022/248, Appendix to circular from Malcolm MacDonald, 12 May 1952.

Consequently, the Singapore intelligence community began devoting increasing attention to China. However, forecasting PRC intentions and capabilities proved difficult. The agencies most involved in intelligence assessment were the JIC(FE), focused on strategic evaluations, and JIB, dedicated to technical appreciations. But intelligence production on communist China was even more problematic than attempts to increase the intake in Southeast Asia. In April 1952, Guy Liddell debriefed Bill Oughton, a SIFE officer posted back to Head Office. Oughton explained that collection remained their Achilles Heel. Producing intelligence assessments was 'rather like trying to make bricks without straw'.[31]

As a result, policy-makers increasingly advocated the use of open source intelligence. Hong Kong was identified as the key site for generating this raw material. This sort of intelligence activity was very low-grade, reacting to the absence of even a basic understanding of the PRC. The historian Eric Setzekorn referred to this dimension of intelligence work as 'cultural intelligence' necessary for forming reliable judgements about a foreign state's behaviour.[32] It was impossible to predict the PRC's intentions without having a basic understanding of the new state's leadership, ideology, structure and society. Open sources including Chinese press and travellers' eyewitness reports were crucial to this project. Ironically, this symbolised a return to the intelligence situation of the previous century. Following intelligence failure during the Second Opium War in 1859-60, British army officers began the first systematic intelligence appreciation of China, reliant on open source information. To quote Setzekorn, 'the challenging task given to a chosen cadre of British Army officers from 1861-1900 was to build a store of knowledge about China starting from zero'.[33] The creation of a new communist state in 1949 effectively took British intelligence back to the start of this process.

Before 1950, British intelligence analysts were relatively sanguine about the strategic threat emanating from China. Their anxieties were centred upon the vulnerable colony of Hong Kong, but the BDCC(FE) concluded that open

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[31] KV 4/474, Liddell diary, 23 April 1952.
[32] Eric Setzekorn, 'The First China Watchers: British Intelligence Officers in China, 1878-1900', *Intelligence and National Security*, 28(2) (2013), 181-201 (p. 184).
[33] Setzekorn, 'The First China Watchers', p. 182.

aggression was very unlikely.[34] The JIC(FE) argued that China would adopt a non-aggressive stance for practical reasons. Not only were the internal social and economic problems facing the new regime so immense, but the CCP was believed to value a British-administered Hong Kong as a window on the world.[35]

However, following the start of the Korean War in June 1950, colonial and defence officials began worrying that China would embark on a more aggressive policy.[36] Their earlier confidence in China's inherent caution was shattered when Chinese forces intervened in Korea from October 1950. In November 1950, the JIC(FE) concluded that 'despite the enormous administrative and economic problems facing the new regime… the [Chinese Communist] Party has found both time and resources to enable it to play a leading role in the propagation of communism throughout the Far East'.[37] This included not only direct engagement with British and United States forces in Korea, but also provision of aid to the Viet Minh in Indochina. An alarmist JIC(FE) report the following month predicted that Chinese military action in Indochina was highly likely.[38] The security threat of CCP-inspired subversion had morphed into a strategic threat of direct Chinese attack.

The crux of the problem lay at the collection stage of the intelligence cycle. Singapore lacked authoritative or insightful sources on the beliefs and intentions of the CCP leadership. Difficulties in gathering information on the new Chinese state included its totalitarian security-tight nature, the conspicuous position of any Europeans in China and lack of Chinese-speaking linguists in the British intelligence community. The latter remained a persistent problem throughout the 1950s, hampering both secret intelligence operations and attempts to translate open sources.[39] As Guy Liddell noted following a JIC(London) debate, 'nobody is at all clear about Chinese intentions'.[40]

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[34] CO 537/4822, BDCC(FE) to Chiefs of Staff, 23 February 1949.
[35] FCO 141/15674, JIC(FE)(49)41(Final), JIC(FE) paper, 'The Threats to Hong Kong', 10 October 1949.
[36] CO 537/6074, Nicoll to Griffiths, 24 July 1950.
[37] FCO 141/15675, JIC(FE)(50)38(Final), JIC(FE) paper, 'Survey of Subversive Communist Activities in the Far East', 20 November 1950.
[38] FO 959/83, JIC(FE)(49)51(Revised), JIC(FE) paper, 'Possible Military Operations in South-East Asia by the Chinese Communist Forces up to the End of 1952', c. December 1950.
[39] CAB 159/20, JIC(55)60th minutes, 3 August 1955.
[40] KV 4/472, Liddell diary, 15 November 1950.

The most obvious source of foreign intelligence was SIS, but they operated very few assets in China before 1949, and even fewer after the communist takeover. This left them reliant on Chinese Nationalist sources, the reliability of which was dubious at best, or intelligence sharing with the United States, which left much to be desired.[41]

Once the PRC was established, encouraging defectors with inside knowledge was a potential source of more reliable human intelligence. But the JIC(London) was pessimistic over their chances of encouraging Chinese defectors. Their rationale was based on a racialist, imperialist world-view, arguing that 'the tendency of the Chinaman was to remain in his own country and to conform to the majority view'. However, in an equally jingoistic assertion, they believed that greed could be used to persuade Chinese to become in situ agents in return for payment.[42] Similar sentiments were expressed by the SIS station chief in Tientsin, who believed that 'virtually no Chinese – one may perhaps say literally none – could be trusted to work honestly for us for as much as twenty-four hours once our backs were turned unless we had some powerful hold over them'.[43]

The influence of racialist ideas upon intelligence presumptions was equally evident amongst the United States intelligence community. A CIA summary from the 1960s notes that the Chinese made difficult agents because of an innate loyalty to traditional structures of authority from the family up to the authoritarian state.

> The Chinese personality pattern and the legacy of traditional Chinese society (between which there is presumably some causal relationship) combine to make the Chinese as a target […] difficult to dislodge from his *quid pro quo* loyalties to regime and family. The principal wedge is a failure in the *quid pro quo*.[44]

This is not dissimilar to the views held by British intelligence authorities a decade previous. However, in the early 1950s, there had been less chance for the PRC

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[41] Christopher Baxter, 'A Closed Book? British Intelligence and East Asia, 1945-1950', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 22(1) (2011), 4-27 (p. 17).
[42] KV 4/472, Liddell diary, 19 October 1950.
[43] Cited in: Jeffery, *MI6*, p. 699.
[44] National Archives and Records Administration [NARA], RG 263, Box 14/39/3, Robert M. Leviness, 'The Chinese as Agent', *Studies in Intelligence 10*, summer 1966.

quid pro quo (of providing stability in return for submission) to have shown itself a failure. From the perspective of imperialistic intelligence planners, this made it even harder to detach these innate Chinese loyalties.

Following the descent of the Korean War into stalemate by summer 1951, the question of defectors returned to prominence. The War Office was keen to promote defectors from the Chinese army to gain tactical intelligence about Korea and the Foreign Office supported more vigorous propaganda to encourage desertion. MI5's Guy Liddell was less convinced: 'if the Foreign Office proposals are to be adopted, we shall probably get a large number of dubious Chinamen who will be hoping to get a wad of money and a peanut store in Singapore'. It could easily become a racket for intelligence peddlers.[45] The concern was that Chinese agents would invent information to feel they had earned their pay, or, if not paid enough, would similarly invent information out of spite.[46] Again, Anglo-American views were entirely in accord. One CIA officer recorded the anecdote of how a Chinese agent fabricated information to please his handler: 'if he [the case officer] had not constantly pressured me to produce,' he [the agent] said, 'I would not have had to fabricate'.[47]

So-called intelligence peddlers were a major problem in Hong Kong. These were usually former Nationalist Chinese (Guomindang) agents who had fled from the mainland. Deprived of any actual intelligence sources, they took to fabrication. In a twelve month period from summer 1951-summer 1952, the Hong Kong SLO submitted the names of 102 alleged intelligence peddlers, leading to 15 arrests and ten deportation orders. This form of refugee intelligence peddling was widespread due to the easiness with which the 'gullible or unwary' (by which the Hong Kong Special Branch meant the Americans) could be led up the garden path.[48] As well as opportunist ex-Guomindang fraudsters, Britain and the United States were concerned about deliberate attempts by their enemies to spread disinformation. Around 1946, the Soviet Union set up a 'disinformation section'

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[45] KV 4/475, Liddell diary, 12 January 1953.
[46] [TNA], CAB 159/12, Minutes of JIC(52)122nd meeting, 5 November 1952.
[47] NARA, RG 263, Box 14/39/3, Robert M. Leviness, 'The Chinese as Agent', *Studies in Intelligence 10*, summer 1966.
[48] [TNA] CO 968/226, Hong Kong Special Branch report, 'Intelligence peddlers in Hong Kong', 28 August 1952.

in their TASS news service in Shanghai to try to infect Western and Guomindang intelligence cycles.[49]

To give a single example of these case histories, one Wong Chi Yung was deported for life in December 1951. He was a former operative of the Guomindang Bureau of Investigation and Statistics (BIS) selling information on PRC naval and air force strength in the border areas and even data on North Korean espionage in Hong Kong. He claimed to be running a network of sub-agents and to have visited Canton, returning with a report on the exact location, strength and details of all local armed forces after only five days. The impossibility of this feat put the SLO onto his tracks, but previously Wong was successful in selling information to British and American intelligence services.[50]

These peddlers were a double-edged nuisance. Most importantly, they directly polluted the intelligence cycle with fabricated information. As well as enjoying initial success in selling information to British agencies, they continued to sell to the United States. Although the CIA did not approach intelligence sharing in a spirit of mutuality, American intelligence agencies could pass on this information to their British allies in a way which would disguise the dubiousness of its source.

These peddlers posed a second problem. This was the sheer amount of time and effort entailed in weeding out their information. It was all very well eliminating sources of phony intelligence, but this did not automatically generate more reliable sources of information. As one SLO in the SIFE area commented, 'virtually no information was coming out of China'.[51]

As well as rogue intelligence peddlers, information shared officially by Guomindang organisations was highly suspect. In late 1947, Guomindang sources propagated false reports of the creation of a Far Eastern Cominform to try to increase support for their failing regime.[52] The unreliability of sources linked to the Guomindang continued as a motif in British, Australian and United States

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[49] Panagiotis Dimitrakis, 'US Intelligence and Chinese Spies in the Civil War', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 13(1) (2014), 62-75 (p. 71).
[50] CO 968/226, Hong Kong Special Branch report, 'Intelligence peddlers in Hong Kong', 28 August 1952.
[51] KV 4/475, Liddell diary, 12 May 1953.
[52] CO 537/2650, SIFE Review of Communism, 23 January 1948.

intelligence assessment throughout the Cold War.[53] Moreover, the Guomindang authorities in Taiwan were reluctant to indulge in sharing of reliable material.[54] In summer 1950, a local Chinese employee of the British consulate in Taipei was arrested by the Guomindang counter-intelligence service as a communist spy. The British were left to find out about this through public press accounts and only received the interrogation reports after much persuasion. This was far from a healthy liaison relationship.[55] However, as noted by one CIA analyst posted to Taiwan, sometimes the Guomindang were able to provide genuine intelligence on the PRC, and the danger for Western recipients in automatically discounting their information as propaganda was one of being careful 'not to throw out the baby with the bath water'.[56] This was not a new problem facing British intelligence officials. During the Second World War, the BIS had passed on agents to Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE) in India. SOE were suspicious of their loyalties, believing that they had been sent to cooperate on the surface whilst hunting for strategic intelligence about Britain's plans for the post-war Far East.[57]

With secret sources proving problematic, intelligence planners sought to expand the provision of open source work about China. This was already being done by the JIB network. The Australian JIB(M) contributed a great deal of expertise on China, where its director, Harold King, had previously worked in the maritime customs service. The Bureau 'acquired a reputation among overseas intelligence agencies of expertise in, and unusual insights into, China's development of its defence infrastructure'.[58] In late 1948, one year before the triumph of the CCP in China's Civil War, the fledgling JIB(M) set China as its top intelligence priority.[59] This was not alone as a case of Britain and Australia

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[53] National Archives of Australia [NAA], A1209, 1958/5716, JIB(M) Report 5/3/53, Sino-Soviet Collaboration up to 30 September 1953.

[54] This perhaps stemmed from earlier fears that the British intelligence services would ally with the CCP or warlords during the Chinese Civil War to preserve British commercial interests. Intelligence sharing did not improve after the victory of the CCP and Britain's recognition of their government in January 1950. See: Dimitrakis, *The Secret War for China*, p. 3.

[55] KV 4/472, Liddell diary, 18 July 1950.

[56] NARA, RG 263, Box 18/40/4, Gail Solin, 'The Art of China-Watching', *Studies in Intelligence 19*, spring 1975.

[57] Christopher J. Murphy, '"Constituting a Problem in Themselves": Countering Covert Chinese Activity in India: The Life and Death of the Chinese Intelligence Section, 1944-46', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 44(6) (2016), 928-951 (p. 934).

[58] Mathams, *Sub Rosa*, p. 58.

[59] [TNA] DEFE 5/13, COS(49)46, JIB(M) Priorities for Australian Intelligence Surveys, 17 November 1948.

pooling resources to deal with the Chinese threat. From the mid-1960s, signals intelligence operations in Hong Kong were jointly administered by GCHQ and the Australian Defence Signals Directorate.[60]

In 1953, the JIB(M) distributed a report on Sino-Soviet collaboration which concluded that China was highly dependent on the USSR. They predicted that the prolongation of the Korean War would reduce China's latitude for pursuing an independent policy. In compiling this report, interviews with evacuees from mainland China, who drew their data from open observation, were the most valued source. The JIB(M) admitted that reliable information on China was extremely difficult to obtain and that much of their paper was speculative.[61]

Other open source methods utilised by the JIB(M) are revealed in the memoirs of the head of its Scientific Intelligence Branch, Major Robert Harry Mathams. From 1958, Mathams directed efforts to provide an order of battle of Chinese scientific resources in response to worries that China might make an unexpected leap forward in defence (particularly nuclear) technology. Mathams used translated Chinese scientific journals which civilian Australian consultants could evaluate for competence. His branch also procured Chinese domestic electronic components from Hong Kong to extrapolate conclusions about comparative scientific prowess. From these evaluations, Mathams revealed the hard decisions Chinese leaders would need to make to effectively deploy their limited scientific resources to meet proclaimed national objectives.[62] Another open source technique was to record the serial numbers of Chinese rolling stock that came into Hong Kong. This enabled the JIB(M) to estimate the total stock of Chinese railway equipment. This technique was derived from wartime practices of noting down the serial numbers of destroyed German tanks to estimate total production.[63]

As a result of Chinese intervention in the Korean War, the demand for open source intelligence about the PRC increased. In December 1950, Malcolm

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[60] Dylan, *Defence Intelligence and the Cold War*, pp. 172-173; Desmond Ball, 'Over and Out: Signals Intelligence (Sigint) in Hong Kong', *Intelligence and National Security*, 11(3) (1996), 474-496 (p. 479).

[61] NAA, A1209, 1958/5716, Annex to JIB(M) Report 5/3/53.

[62] Mathams, *Sub Rosa*, pp. 10-12.

[63] Mathams, *Sub Rosa*, p. 39.

MacDonald took up a proposal generated by his Cold War conference to set up a 'China Bureau' in Singapore. This would be a new intelligence collation and analysis organisation which would use open sources and interviews with travellers crossing the China-Hong Kong border to build a better understanding of the ideology, domestic policies and overseas relationships of the CCP.[64] The Korean War context was critical. As MacDonald argued, 'there can be no doubt that we are faced with a power in China which bids fair to disrupt the world as we know it'.[65]

However, whilst agreeing with the need to exploit open source or cultural intelligence, Whitehall argued that it should be done in London. The Foreign Office envisaged the China Bureau as a guide to national policy, focused on understanding the ideology and strategic intentions of the PRC. This is revealing of a difference in priorities in responding to communist China. In London, the strategic threat was most important; in Singapore, the security threat of the Chinese diaspora was paramount. MacDonald wanted to use China Bureau intelligence to help with counter-subversion and counter-propaganda in Southeast Asia.[66]

Bureaucratic inertia between Singapore and London meant that the China Bureau never came to fruition. Instead, the Foreign Office Research Department (FORD) assumed responsibility for preparing background papers in London. Their first major study of the PRC, completed in June 1951, admitted that any conclusions were speculative and the state of open source intelligence was barely more adequate than secret intelligence.[67] In Singapore, a much smaller China Section was established in Phoenix Park. This Section produced monthly reviews derived from press monitoring reports and was initially overseen by MacDonald's Chinese Affairs advisor George Kitson (who had served with SIS in Shanghai in the 1930s).[68] London later complained that the Singapore China Section was duplicating the work of FORD, but MacDonald defended its existence. His regional bureaucracy needed intelligence more focused on the Chinese diaspora

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[64] FO 371/92352, FC 1681/1, Sterndale Bennett (for MacDonald) to Bevin, 30 December 1950.
[65] FO 371/92352, FC 1681/7, MacDonald to Strang, 17 February 1951.
[66] FO 371/92352, FC 1681/5, Scott to Sterndale Bennett, 22 February 1951.
[67] FO 371/92219, FC 10119/5, Report by R. N. Carew Hunt, 'Chinese Communism and its Relation to Soviet Communism', p. 2.
[68] Dimitrakis, *The Secret War for China,* p. 49.

than the PRC itself, and the China Section played a valuable role in providing interrogation briefs for the Singapore Special Branch. It also provided briefs for an organisation which briefly inherited the name of China Bureau: an interrogation centre in Hong Kong which was set up under joint supervision of the Local Intelligence Committee and RIO.[69]

On 6 March 1951, this interviewing unit began operations under command of Colonel Valentine Rodolphe Burkhardt. Burkhardt had served in the FECB from 1936-39 and worked for the War Office in China during the Second World War, earning a reputation as a 'latter-day Scarlet Pimpernel' by helping Free French supporters leave Shanghai.[70] Because the Governor, Alexander Grantham, was concerned about provoking the PRC, it was agreed that Burkhardt would only interview Westerners leaving China. It was deemed inevitable that interrogating Chinese travellers would be leaked to Beijing and, as well as causing antagonism, would carry the potential for China to plant disinformation. In addition, aforementioned racial prejudices about Chinese informants appear to have carried much weight.[71]

Burkhardt's interviews concentrated on Christian missionaries expelled from the PRC. Their collective output produced commentary on political and social issues such as registration cards, land reform, massacres, taxation on religious incense, medical provision and indoctrination: all of which can be termed 'cultural intelligence'.[72] Most of the information in these reports could be dismissed as anecdotes or gossip. Nevertheless, the fact that Burkhardt's operations continued to receive funding and grow in scale indicated the seriousness of Britain's intelligence weakness in dealing with the PRC. Anything which could give even marginal insight towards a basic understanding of communist China was deemed worth pursuing. As one recent commentator described, 'no good case officers or intercept technicians can make sense out of

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[69] MAC 34/1/76, MacDonald to Foreign Office, 10 April 1953.
[70] Elphick, *Far Eastern File*, p. 281.
[71] FO 371/92352, FC 1681/16, Kitson to Nicoll (Hong Kong), 13 March 1951.
[72] FO 371/92353, FC 1681/19, Kitson to Scott, 25 April 1951; FO 371/92353, FC 1681/23, Interrogation reports by Colonel Burkhardt, 31 May 1951.

what they learn without comprehensive knowledge of the world that surrounds their human or electronic sources'.[73]

Perhaps the key obstacle to providing more useful intelligence on China was the reluctance of the Hong Kong government to risk provoking a crisis. This created animosity between Grantham's administration and the regional-national intelligence community, which wished to exploit Hong Kong for more information. As the Director of Military Intelligence summarised, 'Hong Kong was about the only window into China, providing opportunities for making contact with the Chinese people and extracting information. At the moment there was a singular dearth of such information from other sources'.[74]

These tensions had implications beyond British intelligence. Shortly before the outbreak of the Korean War, Hong Kong's Commissioner of Police, Duncan McIntosh, tried to evict the CIA from the colony. He wrote a long diatribe against United States intelligence officials which was wholly supported by Governor Grantham. They argued that the Americans were endangering the colony through provoking the PRC with their own covert action and support for anti-communist guerrilla movements inside China. The colonial authorities arrested a Chinese agent of the CIA in February 1951, leading the Americans to accuse Grantham's government of bias towards the communists.[75] Then a CIA officer stationed in Hong Kong, James Lilley recalled that 'the British were our allies, but… they were sensitive to anything that could upset [Beijing] about the way Hong Kong was being run'.[76] Even before the conflict began, Grantham refused permission for the CIA to set up a radio station for keeping in contact with anti-communist guerrilla forces on the mainland.[77] MI5 Head Office, although agreeing that the Americans were a nuisance, had to talk Grantham down. Guy Liddell felt that the Governor was too parochial, willing to risk the global Anglo-American intelligence partnership for the sake of just one territory.[78] This is

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[73] Arthur S. Hulnick, 'The Downside of Open Source Intelligence', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 15(4) (2002), 565-579 (p. 565).
[74] KV 4/474, Liddell diary, 16 July 1952.
[75] Lombardo, 'United States Foreign Policy towards the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong', pp. 67-70.
[76] James Lilley and Jeffrey Lilley, *China Hands: Nine Decades of Adventure, Espionage, and Diplomacy in Asia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), p. 83.
[77] Mark, *Hong Kong and the Cold War*, p. 185.
[78] KV 4/472, Liddell diary, 12 June 1950.

implicit of the core point of disagreement. For the regional-national intelligence community in London and Singapore, Hong Kong was no more than a useful intelligence collection centre, and its survival was not an end in itself. These intelligence directors saw Singapore as the more vital imperial asset.

In response to this seemingly intransigent colonial attitude, the Director of Military Intelligence dismissed the Hong Kong government as 'dead weight': an opinion nurtured by a recent visit to the colony. Grantham's administration were not only harming intelligence relations with the Americans, but also blocking British proposals to develop lines into China. London and Singapore were united in the hope of establishing a new interrogation centre for Chinese travellers. The Hong Kong colonial government repeatedly vetoed the project on account of defence concerns which were less important to the regional-national intelligence community.[79]

After months of procrastination, the deadlock was finally overcome. The War Office assumed sole responsibility for the new interrogation unit under the authority of the ranking military intelligence representative in Hong Kong, who was in turn responsible to GSI branch in Singapore and MI2 in London. In August 1953, the new Chinese interrogation unit, codenamed Uplift, commenced operations.[80]

In the end, it does not appear that intelligence agencies or their customers were really satisfied with these endeavours. Little progress was made on establishing an agreed understanding of the basic nature of the PRC. Even in 1956, SIS were still struggling towards a 'proper study of [the] Chinese Communist administration', implying that the national intelligence community was not happy with FORD's theoretical efforts.[81] Despite the efforts to expand open source intelligence, the PRC remained a largely unknown factor in the international sphere. Two decades later, CIA analysts continued to bemoan that the Chinese 'penchant for secrecy' and lack of authoritative sources meant that

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[79] KV 4/474, Liddell diary, 28 May 1952.
[80] CAB 159/14, Minutes of JIC(53)110th meeting, 21 October 1953.
[81] CAB 159/22, Minutes of JIC(56)21st meeting, 29 February 1956.

'China-watching' remained 'imprecise at best' and far below the level of advanced 'Kremlinology'.[82]

The ways in which British intelligence reacted to the China quandary in the early to mid-1950s are indicative of how the escalating Cold War prompted attempts to innovate new (or to revitalise old) intelligence activities in the Far East. Such efforts broadly failed, and information collection remained the critical weakness of the intelligence system. Just as importantly, the debates surrounding China and open source intelligence serve as a reminder that, although there was a remarkable degree of unity between the regional-national intelligence community in Singapore and London, there were still considerable disputes between the regional administration as a whole and metropolitan users of intelligence. Different priorities meant that the Foreign Office and Malcolm MacDonald were opposed in their plans for the direction of open source intelligence. Nevertheless, the greatest division was between a united regional-national intelligence system and local authorities in Hong Kong.

Proactive counter-subversion

As well as providing intelligence assessments for their users, the regional-national intelligence community contributed to the covert implementation of British Cold War policy in two principal areas: propaganda and diplomacy. In this regard, despite the struggles faced in providing useful intelligence for decision-makers, the intelligence apparatus was still able to play a useful role. The expansion of propaganda and covert action in the 1950s reflected a consensus between MacDonald's bureaucracy and the British government for more proactive 'counter subversion' in Southeast Asia. As discussed in chapter one, covert action and secret intelligence are not the same thing. They are, however, often undertaken by the same organisations or same clandestine communities. In addition, operations in pursuance of one can sometimes lead to the other. On the whole, it appears that the covert action side of the secret service community in Singapore was dominated by SIS and RIO. Little information has been disclosed

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[82] NARA, RG 263, Box 18/40/4, Gail Solin, 'The Art of China-Watching', Studies in Intelligence 19, spring 1975.

about SIS operations, whereas RIO's activities are far better documented. In these activities, it is apparent that RIO was using its intake of intelligence from other members of the Singapore intelligence communities to guide its implementation of covert action.

RIO became one of the most important exponents of this policy. Created in 1949 as an offshoot of the IRD, RIO owed its primary allegiance to the Commissioner General. Although intended by IRD to focus on the production of propaganda guidelines for implementation by Britain's local Information Officers across the Far East, RIO also had secondary functions as a producer of 'propaganda intelligence'. As defined by its first director, John Rayner, this entailed intelligence useful for the production of British propaganda and intelligence about enemy (particularly Chinese or Soviet) propaganda. RIO therefore became a centre for open source intelligence.[83]

Rayner struggled to combine both intelligence and propaganda functions with the meagre resources allotted to RIO. His first registry officer, Lieutenant Colonel Jolliffe, was swamped in output work, leading Rayner to search for a specialist Propaganda Intelligence Officer whose sole function would be 'the collection, collation and editing of intelligence, from open and secret sources, suitable for use in propaganda and as background information; and the study of the propaganda output from the countries of the Far East'.[84] Rayner's first Propaganda Intelligence Officer was Catherine Illingworth, who was soon joined by Ann Elwell, the wife of a SIFE officer who came recommended from MI5's overseas trouble-shooter Sir John Shaw.[85] Further intelligence expertise was provided by Dennis Ambler, who occupied the position of Assistant Regional Information Officer in charge of the covert side of RIO from 1950-59. According to the memoirs of a CIA official in regular contact with RIO, Ambler was an SIS operative seconded to RIO.[86] It is worth highlighting that Illingworth and Elwell appear to have been two of the few women to play prominent positions in the British intelligence bureaucracy in Singapore. This intelligence machine was

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[83] FCO 141/15452, Minutes of conference of Information and Public Relations Officers in Southeast Asia, 14-15 July 1949.
[84] FO 1110/187, PR 3146/9G, Rayner to Murray, 11 October 1949.
[85] Maguire, 'British and American Intelligence and Propaganda', pp. 76-77.
[86] Smith, *Portrait of a Cold Warrior*, p. 140; Maguire, 'British and American Intelligence and Propaganda', pp. 90-91.

dominated by men (particularly of the middle classes and above). In particular, Special Branch was almost exclusively a masculine organisation. Gendered roles may have contributed to an intelligence culture which, as subsequent chapters show, sometimes became associated with heavy-handed policing. This is not, however, unique to Singapore. The entry of Illingworth and Elwell into RIO reflects a broader trend in mid-twentieth century British intelligence: that the propaganda and covert action side of secret service bureaucracies were less closed to the advancement of women.[87]

As well as secret material passed on by other agencies, RIO independently collated a vast array of potential intelligence material from overt channels. This ranged from official communist publications to press cuttings from non-communist countries and daily monitoring reports of communist broadcasts from Moscow and Beijing.[88] The research apparatus of RIO distilled this intake into a number of intelligence reports. Their weekly analysis of Chinese propaganda broadcasts was distributed widely throughout the regional-national intelligence community and also to American allies.[89] These analyses were primarily useful for RIO in understanding the themes and strategies of Chinese propaganda in Southeast Asia and facilitating counter-propaganda. They were also useful to RIO's intelligence partners and the Foreign Office as open source information casting light on broader Chinese intentions. From July 1955, open source intelligence production was supplemented by a new publication: *Inside Communist North Vietnam*. Reacting to the Geneva Conference and split of Vietnam along the 17th Parallel in 1954, this digest was based exclusively on official North Vietnamese media and the testimony of defectors or refugees. The first issue focused on themes of government corruption, economic mis-management and Hanoi's subservience to the Soviet Union and China. *Inside Communist North Vietnam* was distributed to RIO's CIA contact, Joseph Smith, and British organisations.[90] With so little intelligence available on new communist

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[87] This can be compared to the war service of female SOE agents. Of course, there were exceptions and women did attain significant positions within the more traditional intelligence services during the early to mid-Cold War, such as Daphne Park in SIS. See: Corera, *MI6*, which discusses Park's career throughout.

[88] FO 1110/281, PR 5/112, Appendix D to report on RIO activities for the Cabinet Committee on Colonial Information Policy, 16 September 1950.

[89] FO 1110/838, PR 10107/5G, RIO analysis of communist broadcasts, 12 January 1955.

[90] FO 1110/724, PR 10117/61, *Inside Communist North Vietnam*, 12 July 1955.

states, RIO's digests assisted more traditional intelligence agencies in building up a picture of background conditions in these unknown countries, supplementing the open source work of the small China Section.

However, RIO's role as an intelligence producer was at a much lower level than the likes of SIFE or SIS. RIO was most useful in providing a channel to pursue more active counter-subversion through 'covert action'. Within Cold War British practices, this was rather loosely defined. Usually, 'covert action' involves activities pursued in support of national foreign policy which are conducted in a deniable or unacknowledged manner. British officials have generally divided it into two categories: operations (such as the Iranian coup of 1953) and propaganda.[91]

In explaining CIA covert action during the Cold War, James Callanan described three basic types of clandestine operation:

1. Defensive covert action: aimed at countering communist efforts to undermine United States allies, such as the paramilitary support given to the Philippines during the Hukbalahap revolt.
2. Offensive covert action: focused on destabilising communist regimes, typified by the Bay of Pigs incident.
3. Preventive covert action: designed to impede or neutralise the potential for the Soviet Union to expand its influence over non-aligned countries in the Third World.[92]

These definitions are equally useful in understanding how Britain sought to use covert action by clandestine agencies to support its foreign policy goals in Southeast Asia. RIO was active in pursuing defensive and preventive covert action in British and foreign territories respectively. Within the limitations of available archival evidence, it appears that RIO did not embark on offensive covert action with one exception: its support to the SIS-led Operation Debenture to encourage dissent and defection within communist China (which is discussed in chapter seven). This was in line with overarching British policy.

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[91] Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny*, pp. 5-6.
[92] James Callanan, *Covert Action in the Cold War: US Policy, Intelligence and CIA Operations* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), pp. 3-4.

During October-December 1955, the British government engaged in high level debates over covert policy. The Foreign Secretary wanted more proactive efforts, particularly in what he termed the 'intermediate' nations of the Middle East and Southeast Asia (such as Laos, Cambodia and Thailand) where Britain had indirect strategic interests. In 1953, Britain cooperated with the CIA in instigating a coup against premier Mossadegh of Iran following his nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company facilities. For Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan, this provided a tempting example for how covert action could achieve foreign policy goals.[93] The Colonial Secretary's viewpoint was more cautious, arguing that 'we should not I think allow the metaphorical expression "cold war" to blind us to the fact that what we are considering is not war-like operations at all, but, whatever methods may be employed, operations which are essentially political'.[94] Nevertheless, this was entirely the point. The political nature of the Cold War, particularly when compounded by the anxieties of decolonisation, lent itself to a solution involving propaganda or covert action administered by the Foreign Office-controlled RIO or SIS.

These debates culminated in a decision by Prime Minister Anthony Eden to reorganise the national system for overseeing covert operations away from the previous committee model.[95] Instead, the Foreign Office (to which both RIO and SIS reported) would have supremacy over covert action in non-British territories. This was to be part of a more assertive 'counter-subversion' policy. Eden emphasised that these operations – defined as 'clandestine activities, whether by propaganda or by operations, directed against communism or, in the colonies, against subversive forms of nationalism' – were to be focused on the colonial sphere and intermediate territories. He saw little prospect in conducting major campaigns against communist states.[96]

RIO supported this proactive 'counter-subversion' agenda by instituting defensive covert action in the colonies. They hoped to control the flow of information reaching the Chinese diaspora in response to concerns that the enhanced prestige of communist China would attract overseas Chinese

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[93] PREM 11/1582, Minute by the Foreign Secretary, 19 October 1955.
[94] PREM 11/1582, Minute by the Colonial Secretary, 15 November 1955.
[95] Cormac, 'The Pinprick Approach', pp. 25-26.
[96] PREM 11/1582, Minute by the Prime Minister, 10 December 1955.

populations to communism. From Hong Kong, RIO worked with the Hungarian Jesuit refugee Father Laszlo Ladany. A respected 'China watcher', Ladany edited an English language newsletter, *China News Analysis*, which was regarded by CIA officer James Lilley as one of the best sources of information on communist China.[97] Based on open source intelligence, this was very critical of the Chinese regime. RIO was not directly involved in this project, but worked with Ladany to publish a Chinese language version, *News from Mainland China*, for distribution in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia.[98]

Similarly aimed at controlling the flow of information about China, RIO covertly funded a publishing house in Hong Kong for printing material including Chinese translations of American school textbooks. In Singapore, they secretly sponsored a bookstore to sell subtly anti-communist works with the intention of gradually moulding public opinion. RIO also distributed an approved guide about universities in mainland China to schools in Singapore and Malaya.[99] The colonial governments were concerned about local Chinese students returning to China, becoming indoctrinated and returning as revolutionary cadres. Rather than prevent travel entirely and appear repressive, RIO hoped to ameliorate the risks more subtly by publishing a carefully selected guide. In undertaking these operations, they relied upon an intake of intelligence not only about China, but also about the popular mood in Singapore and Malaya. They therefore relied upon liaison with Special Branch and SIFE.[100] These can all be classified as examples of defensive covert action utilising 'grey' propaganda methods (information which is broadly true but the purpose and authorship of which is carefully hidden). In none of these cases was RIO's responsibility disclosed, instead acting behind the cover of the Hong Kong publishing house or the priest Father Ladany.

Outside British territories, RIO had fewer automatic opportunities to influence public opinion. Nevertheless, alongside more traditional publicity efforts, they utilised covert initiatives to target particular sections of society in the 'intermediate' territories of Southeast Asia. This constituted preventive covert

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[97] Lilley, *China Hands*, p. 139.
[98] FO 1110/1056, PR 10109/63G, Norman Cox (RIO) to Hugh Cortazzi (IRD), 19 July 1957.
[99] FO 1110/952, PR 10106/37G, RIO covert propaganda report, 20 April 1956.
[100] For this problem in broader geographical context, see: Christopher Sutton, "Britain, the Cold War and the 'Importance of Influencing the Young': A Comparison of Cyprus and Hong Kong," *Britain and the World*, 7(1) (2014): 85-108.

action aimed at forestalling communist takeovers. As well as providing intelligence, communist defectors proved a useful tool for these RIO operations. In late 1955, they arranged for Kavinh Keohoun, a Pathet Lao defector, to give a press conference at the Laotian Embassy in Bangkok. Britain's extensive international connections with SEATO and non-SEATO powers made RIO the ideal go-between. Following the reported success of this event, they arranged for a surrendered Malayan communist insurgent to address a Chinese audience in South Vietnam.[101]

A more controversial approach to the Vietnam quagmire was proposed by Assistant Regional Information Officer Geoffrey Crossley following a tour of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in December 1954. British Information Officers liaised with local propaganda services, but felt hampered by the defeatism of these partners. The prevailing attitude in South Vietnam seemed to be that it was impossible to out-publicise the Viet Minh, for 'they have propaganda organised down to the level of the village coffee table'.[102]

RIO's priority was to promote stable government in South Vietnam to contain the spread of communism. This was an uphill struggle given the corruption, nepotism and religious intolerance of the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem. To help stabilise Diem, Crossley suggested a radical way of giving 'friendly' help. RIO could place unattributable criticism in the local press and expose the inadequacies of the regime in the hope that this would generate public pressure to make Diem reform before it was too late. Crossley argued that the best solution to stabilising the Diem government was to destabilise it in a controlled manner. His proposal would have entangled RIO in reshaping the South Vietnam government in an image desirable to Britain.[103] It is not clear whether Crossley's ideas were implemented in practice, but their proposal by a senior RIO official was indicative of the potential of propaganda to be a tool for covert action. The difference between this proposal for an operation in a foreign territory and the more limited aims of RIO's operations in British colonies is worth noting. In Singapore,

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[101] FO 1110/951, PR 10106/3G, RIO covert propaganda report 4/1955, 11 January 1956; FO 1110/952, PR 10106/37G, RIO covert propaganda report 1/1956, 20 April 1956.
[102] MAC 18/11/64-68, Memorandum by Crossley, 'Information Work in Indochina', 11 December 1954.
[103] Ibid.

Malaya and Hong Kong, RIO used propaganda to influence mass opinion in limited, defensive covert action, whereas Crossley's proposal was targeted at changing the policies of the South Vietnamese government.

Less controversially, in late 1955, RIO worked to disrupt the flow of communist publications from Hong Kong to Indonesia. Almost a decade earlier, SIFE had warned that Hong Kong was becoming 'a communist liaison centre between the CCP and communist circles in Asia, Europe and America'.[104] Meanwhile, Indonesia was a persistent secondary security concern following its hard-won independence. At first the threat was of revolutionary nationalism, but SIFE tempered this by cooperating with and helping to train the Indonesian security services. In the early 1950s, Indonesia became one of SIFE's closest foreign partners.[105] By the middle of the decade, concerns arose that Indonesia's President Sukarno was increasingly influenced by communism. This led to Anglo-American support for the failed Outer Islands Rebellion in 1958.[106] On the road to this fateful decision – which only served to increase tensions – RIO hoped to forestall growing communist influence by liaising with security services in Hong Kong to disrupt the flow of communist propaganda.[107]

These covert operations were important because of the limitations of more overt publicity in supporting foreign policy. In 1954, the British Information Officer in Djakarta provided a scathing and humorous critique of how British publicity failed to achieve its goals in Indonesia. RIO's primary targets were the less hard-core fringe of the PKI (the Indonesian communist party) and the Chinese diaspora. Neither of these groups seemed to react well to overt propaganda (see table 5.2).

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[104] CO 537/2650, SIFE Review of Communism, 23 February 1948.
[105] KV 4/424, SIFE internal review, 2 April 1952.
[106] Jones, 'Maximum Disavowable Aid', pp. 1179-1216.
[107] FO 1110/951, PR 10106/3G, RIO covert propaganda report, 11 January 1956.

Table 5.2. Local reactions to RIO propaganda in Indonesia, 1954.[108]

Propaganda line	PKI fringe reaction	Chinese diaspora reaction
Communism aims at world domination	Better keep on the right side	Good for Mao
Communism relies on force and fraud	So do the 'colonialists'	Why not?
Communism tolerates no second allegiance	Impressive	Stronger than any other secret society
Communism denies liberty to the individual	Better be in on the ground floor to do the denying	How much liberty did any Chinese peasant have in the old days?
Communism has failed as a faith and a method	Colonialism has failed, communism is in the ascendant	Dien Bien Phu
The Free World has a positive answer	Please leave us alone	Chiang Kai-shek?
The Free World is able and prepared to defend its freedom	Atom bombs for Asians	Foreign devils

RIO's involvement in covert action revealed the opportunities and limitations for implementing the policy envisaged by Prime Minister Anthony Eden. Eden emphasised that covert action was not an end in itself but a subsidiary instrument to support the overt policies pursued by the British government.[109] Careful control by the Foreign Office was paramount. Crossley's Vietnam proposal – if pursued – would have entangled Britain in the Vietnam morass beyond the national agenda of supporting non-communist states without entering into extensive commitments. It is highly unlikely that these measures were ever approved and implemented in practice. Equally controversial proposals by the SIS Bangkok station to pay an assassin £10,000 to murder leading communists in

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[108] FO 1110/709, PR 10106/93G, Micklethwaite (Djakarta) to Rennie (IRD), 13 May 1954.
[109] PREM 11/1582, Minute by the Prime Minister, 10 December 1955.

Laos were quashed by Dick White, who moved from being Director-General of MI5 to Chief of SIS in 1956.[110] Nevertheless, their proposal demonstrated that a different level of deniable operation was conceivable in the foreign sphere than the colonies. RIO's activities in Singapore and Malaya were more restrained partly because of the process of decolonisation. By 1955, Singapore had a locally-elected government working with the British Governor. Deniability was increasingly difficult on the road to independence.

Looking through the archival records of RIO implies that Eden's vision of a covert action programme closely aligned with overt policy was faithfully followed through. RIO operations relating to Laos and Indonesia conformed to broader Foreign Office goals with regard to those countries, and also supported other clandestine activities such as SIFE security intelligence training. In total, these activities show that Britain became more proactively engaged with the Cold War in Southeast Asia than it appeared on the overt level. Overtly, Britain seemed less involved in the regional Cold War than the United States, but clandestine operations provided an opportunity to exert influence despite Britain's dwindling formal power. Therefore, the efforts of SIFE, SIS and RIO were a vital supplement to overall foreign policy. Whilst the value of the narrowly defined intelligence production functions of the regional bureaucracy may have deserved the label of a 'slough of despond', the utility of the Singapore intelligence milieu to policy implementation tells a different story. If Singapore appeared (to imperialist intelligence officials) to be a 'unique window' on Southeast Asia, then this was a window which could be opened to allow covert influence to pass through.

Intelligence diplomacy

RIO's engagement with covert action illustrates how the regional intelligence milieu played a proactive role in implementing national policy. As well as propaganda, this was achieved through intelligence diplomacy with foreign services throughout the region. This was partly done to improve their

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[110] Tom Bower, *The Perfect English Spy: Sir Dick White and the Secret War, 1935-90* (London: Heinemann, 1995), p. 227.

intake of raw intelligence, but also to support British policy in building up the northern arc of Southeast Asian countries as a non-communist buffer zone to protect British interests in Malaya and Singapore. The former can be characterised as intelligence liaison – networking between intelligence agencies to fulfil bureaucratic interests – whilst the latter represented intelligence diplomacy: the use of intelligence actors to fulfil foreign policy goals. Such endeavours emphasise the potential of intelligence officers to act as non-traditional diplomats in pursuit of state foreign policy (as well as the more narrow goals of the intelligence agencies they represented). This supports the contention of New Diplomatic Historians that diplomacy is an activity entered into by a range of official, semi-official and unofficial actors. The advantage of using intelligence actors as diplomats was that they possessed official and authoritative standing – like traditional diplomatic actors – but could operate at the clandestine level. The quasi-diplomatic activities of intelligence agencies had the benefit of entailing fewer overt commitments than ordinary channels. In other words, Britain could use intelligence diplomacy to build relationships when official foreign policy adopted a more hands-off stance, such as with the former French Indochina colonies.

One recent article about SIS officers in the Hanoi embassy during the United States-Vietnam War noted that intelligence officers sometimes 'operated in a blurred space between espionage and diplomacy'.[111] If this is true for SIS, then MI5 global activities can equally be characterised as quasi-diplomatic through the role of SIFE and SLOs. Their main purpose was to ensure former colonies remained pro-British and anti-Soviet. Maintaining security cooperation within a Commonwealth framework became a critical goal for MI5's global activities in the 1950s and 1960s.[112] Furthermore, due to the fear of a spreading Cold War, security intelligence cooperation was not limited to the Commonwealth, but also entailed relationships with the likes of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. As well as bilateral relationships with foreign powers, the SEATO alliance provided another important outlet for intelligence diplomacy.[113]

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[111] Wolf, 'This Secret Town', p. 339.
[112] Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 442; Murphy, 'Creating a Commonwealth Intelligence Culture' pp. 136-137.
[113] McKnight, 'Western Intelligence and SEATO's War on Subversion', pp. 288-303.

Nevertheless, there were serious limitations to this practice. As other scholars have noted, intelligence sharing is usually very cautious. Justifications for not being totally candid with allies can include the need to protect sources of intelligence, worries about distribution to third parties, and a desire to keep the practice of intelligence liaison secret.[114] Consequently, the intelligence diplomacy undertaken by the regional-national intelligence community achieved far less for actual intelligence production that it did in cultivating alignments to support Cold War policy.

Such activities were far from being a new departure. The diplomatic functions of intelligence officers were apparent at least as far back as the so-called 'Great Game' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. British imperial agents working on the borderlands of Empire were tasked not only with producing information, but also with winning the support of local Asian leaders and ensuring they remained immune to Russian overtures.[115] When tensions with Russia assumed a new guise following the 1917 Revolution, Britain responded to fears about Comintern influence in the colonies through stepping-up its intelligence cooperation with other colonial powers in Southeast Asia.[116] One example of this was the passing of control over double agent Lai Tek from French counterintelligence to the Singapore Special Branch when he departed Indochina in the 1930s. The policy pursued after 1945 was a continuation of this tried-and-tested strategy for dealing with the Russian threat.

In the 1950s, MI5 Head Office played an important role in developing international relationships through offering training to colonial Special Branches and the security services of independent nations. This was inseparable from the global Cold War. According to the notorious MI5 whistle-blower and conspiracy theorist Peter Wright, Director-General Sir Dick White 'believed in the fashionable idea of "containing" the Soviet Union, and that MI5 had a vital role to play in neutralising Soviet assets'.[117] This programme therefore supported Britain's over-arching containment goals through promoting a stable non-

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[114] Matejova and Munton, 'Western Intelligence Cooperation on Vietnam', pp. 149-150.

[115] Robert Johnson, *Spying for Empire: The Great Game in Central and South Asia* (London: Greenhill Books, 2006), p. 21.

[116] Antony Best, '"We Are Virtually at War with Russia": Britain and the Cold War in East Asia, 1923-40, *Cold War History*, 12(2) (2003), 205-225 (p. 214).

[117] Cited in: Chikara Hashimoto, 'The Training of Secret Police', p. 4.

communist Southeast Asia. Chikara Hashimoto's research into MI5 and SIME activities in the Middle East highlighted the ambiguities and strategic failings of this policy, which only served to support authoritarian regimes and stoke popular anti-British sentiment.[118] However, the comparable role of MI5 and other British intelligence organisations in Southeast Asia has received less attention.

Britain's most significant global ally was undoubtedly the United States. However, despite a wide-ranging European partnership in signals and human intelligence, in Southeast Asia, both parties remained reluctant to engage in meaningful sharing.[119] Relations between SIFE and potential United States partners including the CIA were superficially cordial. During his year in Singapore from 1948-49 Alex Kellar made a point of establishing 'profitable and friendly' relations with CIA Station Chief Bob Jantzen.[120] Yet despite a positive appearance on the surface, intelligence relations with the Americans were never smooth. During the Korean War, SIFE complained that the United States shared negligible quantities of intelligence on East Asia despite their two nations being allies in a hot war.[121]

Trying to improve this situation, Jack Morton held a conference with the CIA to make progress on combined intelligence efforts. They agreed to adopt a joint plan of research to avoid duplication, and also to coordinate the advice and intelligence they were passing to common allies.[122] SIS made similar overtures. Far East Controller Maurice Oldfield – described as a 'hedonist who drank whiskey, told dirty jokes and had won a reputation as a Far East expert' – negotiated the Four Square Agreement with the CIA. This separated spheres of influence in Southeast Asia between the CIA and British intelligence based upon former or current colonial possessions. They also pledged to cooperate in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Indonesia, thereby authorising representatives on the ground to undertake joint operations without specific reference to Washington or London. Overall, these efforts were not successful in practice. Despite being seen by enthusiastic CIA and SIS officers as a license to

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[118] Hashimoto, 'The Training of Secret Police', p. 1.
[119] Aldrich, 'The Value of Residual Empire', p. 230.
[120] KV 4/423, Kellar to Sillitoe, 5 November 1948.
[121] KV 4/424, SIFE internal review (revised), 12 May 1952.
[122] KV 4/424, SIFE internal review, 2 April 1952.

wage Cold War, the Four Square Agreement produced little progress.[123] In preparation for a visit to Singapore in January 1954, MI5 Director-General Sir Dick White was informed that the CIA remained reluctant to share intelligence despite maintaining close contact with SIFE and SIS. Despite general policy agreements, the majority of intelligence traffic appeared to be going one-way from the British to the Americans. MI5 attributed this to overall Anglo-American policy differences over China.[124]

Reading between the lines, it becomes apparent that this reluctance was not as one-way as SIFE documents implied. British intelligence authorities were equally reluctant to share raw material with the United States. JIC(London) Chairman Patrick Dean noticed that SIFE seemed more willing to engage in meaningful collaboration with Asian powers whose intelligence services they had helped to train than with their American allies. In British eyes, United States agencies such as the CIA were seen to be susceptible to 'wild reporting' and 'unfortunate indiscretions'.[125] The CIA was not unaware of these British prejudices. The CIA station chief in Singapore, Bob Jantzen, told his propaganda expert that 'the thing is, these [British] guys are really nuts about security and won't even tell each other what they're doing, much less us'.[126]

Despite a certain guarded jealousy on the part of SIFE, other British agencies were keener to explore cooperation with their American allies. In 1954, Malcolm MacDonald proposed that the United States participate in the JIC(FE). Australian observers had long been present, and both Dean and the CIA Director, Allen Dulles, welcomed the idea. London was less supportive, worrying that Washington may get the wrong idea and treat the views of MacDonald's bureaucracy as official national policy rather than the opinions of Singapore regional officialdom. Working past these objections, Dulles formally accepted the invitation. Michael Stewart, chairman of the JIC(FE), welcomed this development as a new chance to engage in meaningful intelligence sharing.[127] Whether this was

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[123] Bower, *The Perfect English Spy*, pp. 226-227.

[124] KV 4/426, MI5 brief, 'SIFE Liaison with Foreign Intelligence Services', 20 January 1954.

[125] DEFE 5/66, COS(56)125, Report on a visit to the Far East by the JIC Chairman and ACAS(I), 27 March 1956.

[126] Smith, *Portrait of a Cold Warrior*, p. 166.

[127] CAB 159/15, Minutes of JIC(54)48th meeting, 27 May 1954; CAB 159/16, Minutes of JIC(54)71st meeting, 12 August 1954.

actually achieved is far from certain. The CIA sent Russell Jack Smith to Singapore as their observer to the JIC(FE), but Smith's memoirs give more attention to his social than professional activities.[128]

Relations with the United States were characterised by a dichotomy of cordial dialogues and policy agreements alongside mutual reluctance for intelligence sharing. Relationships with European colonial powers were sometimes more substantial. These examples of intelligence diplomacy were an important corollary to Britain's overall foreign policy. In the late 1940s, Britain sought to engender greater regional cooperation between interested states in Southeast Asia. At first, the mechanism chosen for pursuing this was the Special Commissioner, who held regular liaison meetings on technical subjects (linked with the problem of rice shortages). These lapsed following the recall of Killearn in 1948. Intelligence, particularly security intelligence, became the new vanguard of Britain's attempts to promote regional collaboration. This was particularly apparent in relations with other colonial powers. Britain did not wish to be seen to be openly collaborating with the French and Dutch for fear of alienating Asian opinion and harming their hopes of remaining a regional hegemon.[129] Consequently, intelligence diplomacy created opportunities to build covert Cold War alignments with other Western powers. By the 1950s, it also proved to be a valuable strategy in encouraging cooperation with Asian states.

Successive heads of SIFE strove to cultivate liaison with their colleagues in the French *Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage* (SDECE) and the Netherlands East Indies Forces Intelligence Service (NEFIS). NEFIS liaised with SIFE via Van Hulst, an experienced Special Branch-style officer from Dutch Indonesia who utilised vice-consular cover in Singapore. It took longer for France to establish formal liaison relations, eradicating Kellar's hopes for tripartite colonial liaison before Indonesian independence in 1949 rendered such a plan obsolete.[130]

Crucially, this headquarters coordination was backed up by the sharing of processed intelligence. In Batavia, NEFIS passed selected information to the

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[128] Aldrich, 'The Value of Residual Empire', p. 254; Smith, *The Unknown CIA*, pp. 111-120.
[129] Remme, *Britain and Regional Cooperation*, pp. 136-140.
[130] KV 4/423, Kellar to Sillitoe, 5 November 1948.

British Consul-General, Sir Francis Shepherd. Shepherd was not always appreciative of the quality of this material, scathingly attacking two government publications which utilised NEFIS intelligence:

> This is however, an even more blatant than usual case of the Dutch habit of producing a certain number of facts in circumstances of their own choosing in order to 'make their point'. Even Dutch intelligence circles who should have no axes to grind and should only keep to fact, continually jump to conclusions that they would like to think were fact […] I make my usual criticism as on all NEFIS material that it is too apt to jump to conclusions, the conclusions they may wish to draw.[131]

This critique raises the question as to what was so very different between this 'Dutch' approach and how Britain derived conclusions about communist trends with little reliable information. According to the Dutch historian Bart Luttikhuis, NEFIS 'often worked with only the thinnest of information, filling in the gaps with guesswork and preconceived notions'. Colonial racial preconceptions sometimes skewed analysis; for example, NEFIS were suspicion of citizens who moved around a lot as this did not fit their view of Indonesian societal norms.[132] In light of such research, the British criticisms could appear justified, but are somewhat ironic given the situation in the British territories. As seen in chapter three, the JIC(FE) and user departments such as the Foreign Office were frequently forced to admit that they were formulating conclusions despite very little evidence. Meanwhile, at the local level, primary users such as the Colonial Secretary's department continued to view the Chinese population through racial classifications.

Nevertheless, despite this dissatisfaction with shared intelligence product, at least two-way dialogues were successfully established in the Anglo-Dutch intelligence relationship. After 1949, although losing the majority of their imperial territories in Southeast Asia, the Dutch retained a presence on New Guinea. The former NEFIS signals intelligence section continued to operate from this base. Some of their intelligence was shared with Britain, and in return, the Dutch sent a naval intelligence officer to Singapore to obtain British information on anti-Sukarno movements in Indonesia. In the late 1950s, Indonesia was a common

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[131] [TNA] FO 810/23, Unsigned minute [Shepherd], 16 February 1948.
[132] Luttikhuis, 'Creating Distrust through Intelligence Work', p. 161, 164.

security threat to British Singapore and Dutch New Guinea, so there was a more tangible motive for sharing intelligence than in the Anglo-American case.[133]

Intelligence sharing between British and French agencies was more akin to the strained relationships with the United States. SIFE placed the blame on the French because of internal intelligence rivalries, a supposedly traditional anti-British outlook and a focus on tactical counterinsurgency rather than the strategic regional picture. However, we can question whether these criticisms would be equally applicable to British intelligence, its deficiencies and prejudices, at the time. Nevertheless, by 1952, the SIFE liaison officer in Saigon (i.e. the SIS head of station now that the JID was in operation) had established direct contact with the SDECE and the new Vietnamese Security Service, who had allowed him to interrogate a Viet Minh defector.[134]

But as with the American case, this explanation of the reasons for poor intelligence sharing is unacceptable. Guy Liddell's diaries instead demonstrate that British agencies were unwilling to pass security intelligence relating to the Malayan Emergency to the French. JIC(FE) chairman Michael Creswell may well have bemoaned that the SDECE were not supplying much intelligence on Viet Minh links with China, but if they were unwilling to share comparable intelligence in return, the French attitude is hardly surprising.[135] MI5 remained reluctant to give away more information than a 'need to know' basis and were concerned for the security of their sources. Liddell was irritated that the French repeatedly accused SIFE of holding back on liaison, writing that 'the idea of the omniscience of ourselves and the Americans in the intelligence field seems to be prevalent in every area where collaboration with the French is going on'. Whilst it was true that the British were equally in the dark regarding Chinese and Soviet intentions, the greater geographic breadth of their regional apparatus meant that Britain was – if far from omniscient – then certainly much better placed to evaluate trends in regional communist capabilities.[136]

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[133] Platje, 'Dutch Sigint and the Conflict with Indonesia', p. 301.
[134] KV 4/424, SIFE internal review, 2 April 1952.
[135] KV 4/472, Liddell diary, 11 May 1950.
[136] KV 4/473, Liddell diary, 14 June 1951.

From this admittedly sparse evidence, it appears that, despite commitments to cooperation at the directional level, intelligence relationships with other Western powers were characterised by mutual suspicions of colonial rivalries and lax security.[137] Despite possessing an imperialist world-view, British agencies seem to have placed greater faith in their ability to establish relations with newly independent Asian powers. In part this was because MI5 offered support in setting up their intelligence services, ensuring post-colonial states remained indebted to and modelled upon the British intelligence system.

This was not merely limited to nations emerging from British decolonisation, but also the former colonies of the French and Dutch empires. Laos and Cambodia were assisted through MI5 training programmes as well as advice from RIO. These were key new states in the frontline of the Cold War, and were therefore important allies in Britain's non-communist front. Such states were viable targets for setting up close intelligence partnerships as Britain was not directly tainted with the legacy of the departed imperial power. Other recipients of training assistance included the Thai, Burmese, Indonesian and Filipino security services, to which MacDonald offered subsidised places at the Special Branch School in Kuala Lumpur.[138]

In October 1954, JIC(FE) Chairman Andrew Gilchrist visited Bangkok to assess the security situation. Gilchrist had served in multiple Foreign Office positions in Thailand, and during the Second World War organised undercover resistance in that country for Force 136 of the Special Operations Executive. Unlike previous JIC(FE) Chairmen, Gilchrist was an experienced regional diplomat and intelligence officer. During his 1954 visit, Gilchrist reported that greater overt assistance to Thailand, Laos and Cambodia was paramount. He predicted that South Vietnam would fall to communism within a year and was of no utility beyond being a case study of how not to contain communism. Therefore, the other three states in the upper arc would become the forward defence for British Malaya.[139] Britain was not willing to directly commit to the

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[137] Files listed by the National Archives on the subject of intelligence liaison with NEFIS and the CIA remain closed despite Freedom of Information requests by the author.
[138] MAC 18/11/28-40, MacDonald to Eden, 1 July 1954; KV 4/427, Memorandum by Thistlethwaite, 'SIFE's Future', 30 September 1955.
[139] [TNA] FO 1091/38, Report by Gilchrist on a trip to Bangkok, 28 October 1954.

defence of these nations, and as Commissioner General, MacDonald directed a policy of supporting a non-communist, neutral South-East Asia. This was different from the proactively anti-communist vision of the United States.[140] Intelligence diplomacy gave Britain the opportunity to engage with the Cold War covertly whilst publicly maintaining a more hands-off stance than the Americans. On his tour of Thailand and Indochina, Gilchrist observed that RIO and SIFE were playing an important role in training local intelligence services.[141]

Offering assistance to Asian powers was not philanthropic but rather an attempt to shore up British regional influence, increase the viability of non-communist governments which stood between China and Singapore, and also to generate new sources of intelligence collection.

In the early 1950s, one of SIFE's closest foreign partners was Indonesia, showing that productive intelligence cooperation was possible before increasing Anglo-Indonesian confrontation in the latter half of the decade. In 1954, Indonesia was the only non-Western state to liaise directly with SIFE in Singapore. Djakarta retained one of the pre-independence Dutch liaison officers as their intermediary. This placed Indonesia on the same liaison footing as the United States, Netherlands and France.[142]

Partnerships with Asian security services were strengthened following the Manila Pact of September 1954. MacDonald saw SEATO as one of Britain's three lines of defence against communism, along with bilateral support to local governments and British-led development aid through the Colombo Plan.[143] The creation of SEATO was one of the principal factors leading to the retention of the office of Commissioner General under Robert Scott.

JIC(FE) chairman Andrew Gilchrist had less faith in the value of multilateral cooperation through SEATO. He preferred bilateral intelligence relationships such as Britain's existing arrangements for training Southeast Asian security forces. Even MacDonald agreed, although he was convinced that the

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[140] MAC 121/20/242-243, Draft material on Southeast Asia for *Constant Surprise.*
[141] FO 1091/38, Report by Gilchrist on a trip to Bangkok, 28 October 1954.
[142] KV 4/424, SIFE internal review, 2 April 1952; KV 4/426, Note on SIFE for London JIC, 28 August 1954.
[143] FO 1091/2, Record of Mallaig Conference, 1 March 1955.

defence and political value of SEATO outweighed its cumbersome intelligence existence. They worried that the creation of SEATO could alienate existing intelligence liaison with non-members such as Burma and Indonesia.[144] As well as intelligence training relationships, Britain also engaged in intelligence sharing with some Southeast Asian actors. The current evidence in the British archives gives little insight into what information Britain gave away, and only scant clues as to what they received in return. In June 1950, the Philippines Department of National Defence passed on a precis of documents surrendered by two defectors from the Hukbalahap communist insurgency. Like the MCP, the Hukbalahap movement had originated as an anti-Japanese resistance but continued their struggle against government forces after the end of the Second World War. However, this precis did not contain the original documents and was focused on Hukbalahap propaganda.[145] It is unlikely that such information would be of much use to SIFE or the JIC(FE). However, without more evidence, it is impossible to generalise about whether such documents are typical of the intelligence Britain was receiving from Southeast Asian partners.

The major intelligence problem constituted by SEATO was the fact that British intelligence authorities did not have much faith in the protective security capabilities of the three Asian members (Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand). Training their security officers and accepting intelligence material in return was one matter, but sharing secret material gathered by British agencies was another. Patrick Dean argued that 'we and the Americans (and to some extent the Australians and Indonesia) are the only people in the area who really run effective intelligence/security organisations'. He therefore proposed a two-tier approach to SEATO intelligence cooperation. Outwardly, a small amount of material would be shared without reservation. The real work would be done by an informal grouping of the Western members exchanging intelligence more frankly under the counter.[146]

This cynical approach became a broad guideline to Britain's engagement with SEATO. In May 1955, the JIC(FE) prepared a report for the meeting of the

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[144] Ibid.
[145] FO 371/84339, FP 1691/1, British Legation Manila to Chancery, Office of the Commissioner-General, 12 June 1950.
[146] FO 371/111896, D 1074/833, Minute by Dean, 18 November 1954.

SEATO Ad Hoc Intelligence Sub-Committee which would be held in Singapore (possibly as recognition of the city's status as an intelligence centre) on 19 July 1955. They carefully expurgated sensitive details and left in 'just enough secret information to make it realistic'.[147] Similar reservations were made even within the Commonwealth. In the late 1940s, Britain created 'dummy' intelligence estimates to circulate to states such as India.[148] The JIC differentiated between the trusting intelligence relationships of the 'old' Commonwealth, such as Australia and New Zealand, and its relations with newer Asian members who were seen as less adept at protective security.[149] It is somewhat suspicious that the JIC(London) was voicing these opinions in 1949, shortly after Anglo-American concerns over security in Australia had prompted a rupture in intelligence sharing and the despatch of MI5 specialists to help create a new security service. This would seem to imply that concerns about security were as much influenced by imperialist prejudices as reality.

The SEATO Ad Hoc Intelligence Sub-Committee quickly became known as the Committee to Counter Communist Subversion. In 1956, at British suggestion, it was renamed the Committee of Security Experts. Its two primary functions were to ensure continuing exchange of intelligence between members and to offer mutual advice on security matters. H/SIFE served as British representative until SIFE was wound down in 1963, after which his seat was filled by the SIS Head of Station in Bangkok.[150] But the Committee of Security Experts proved a problematic organisation hampered by reluctance for intelligence sharing on an equal basis. Britain and the United States had access to intelligence sources which, although far from perfect, gave a fuller picture than the Asian powers. Yet they were unwilling to share valuable intelligence.[151]

Britain was arguably the worst offender at intelligence sharing chauvinism. H/SIFE Dick Thistlethwaite regarded SEATO as 'one of the biggest time-consumers and paper-producers of all time'.[152] During the fourth security

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[147] CAB 159/19, Minutes of JIC(55)41st meeting, 25 May 1955.
[148] Aldrich, 'The Value of Residual Empire', p. 245.
[149] IOR/L/WS/1/1051, Extract from JIC(49)70th minutes, 14 July 1949.
[150] McKnight, 'Western Intelligence and SEATO's War on Subversion', p. 293.
[151] NAA, A1838, 2464/3, Minute by New Zealand Department of External Affairs, 'SEATO: The Intelligence Problem', 30 April 1956.
[152] KV 4/428, Thistlethwaite to Director-General, 14 August 1956.

meeting in June 1956, the Americans tabled a proposal for sharing information obtained in the debriefing of nationals leaving communist areas. Thistlethwaite dismissed this as 'almost indiscriminate' distribution of valuable interrogation intelligence. Supported by the Australian delegate, ASIO Director-General Sir Charles Spry, he opposed the motion on grounds that informants would be deterred from full disclosure if they were worried about leakages brought about by over-zealous intelligence sharing with less security-conscious partners. Thistlethwaite and Spry persuaded the Americans to modify the proposal on a more selective basis.[153] This raises questions surrounding the commitment of SIFE to genuine intelligence partnerships.

Because of the high-handed approach of SIFE and the JIC(FE), RIO became one of the main participants in intelligence exchange with SEATO. After succeeding Rayner as director in 1956, Desmond Pakenham noted that the SEATO Research Service Centre benefitted greatly from the supply of RIO's open source intelligence about the communist threat in Southeast Asia. Whilst SIFE was unwilling to exchange top secret information, RIO's lower-level intelligence could be safely disseminated through SEATO without equivalent security fears.[154]

As well as using SEATO as a mechanism for intelligence liaison, SIFE constructed multilateral partnerships on a broader basis. In October 1958, Scott and Thistlethwaite took the lead in a security problem common to many states in the region: reintegrating surrendered communist insurgents back into society without prejudicing national security. They hosted a small conference of SEATO (the Philippines, United States, Australia and New Zealand) and non-SEATO (Laos, South Vietnam, Malaya and Singapore) countries. This was doubly useful. As well as helping define solutions to the shared problem, the conference encouraged future regional collaborations with broader participation than SEATO.[155] To this end, SIFE allowed its Asian partners to direct discussions. The newly independent Federation of Malaya led a session on interrogation

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[153] NAA, A1838, 2464/4, Quinn to Plimsoll, 11 June 1956.
[154] FO 1110/1052, PR 10106/59, Pakenham to Rivett-Carnac, 13 August 1957.
[155] FCO 141/14846, Circular from Scott, 12 April 1958; FCO 141/14846, Mackintosh to Morland, 20 September 1958.

techniques, whilst on the final two days, the Filipino delegation led discussion of resettlement problems.[156]

Britain's effectiveness in developing international intelligence relationships was a mixed record. On the one hand, agencies such as SIFE were successful in arranging for top-level liaison with some coordination of direction with Western allies. They were yet more proactive in developing intelligence diplomacy through offering training assistance to newly independent Asian nations. However, beneath this veneer of cooperation there was little substantive information exchange. Britain and its Western partners were equally reluctant to engage in meaningful intelligence sharing because of conflicting national policies, mutual distrust and a chauvinistic attitude towards the safeguarding prowess of Asian security services. Ironically, these same services were at least partially trained by MI5.

These barriers to more fruitful multilateral liaison were not exclusive to SEATO. As shown by Chikara Hashimoto's research, the Baghdad Pact in the Middle East suffered from similar problems. British agencies, particularly MI5, saw information security and effective vetting procedures as a fundamental prerequisite to intelligence cooperation. But in both the Baghdad Pact and SEATO, British experts did not rate the aptitude of local members at all highly. Any intelligence shared took the form of finished assessments carefully concealing the actual sources of intelligence. This security concern was compounded by differing perceptions of the threat. Whilst the Baghdad Pact was split over attitudes to non-communist subversive movements, SEATO was divided over how to respond to the Cold War. Political obstacles were also apparent between Britain and the United States, who had very different approaches to containing communism in Asia. Their divergence was typified by Britain's diplomatic recognition of the PRC and Washington's refusal to do so. As a result, most meaningful intelligence sharing was either on a bilateral basis or through lower-level channels such as the SEATO Research Service Centre.[157] This is indicative of a particular British attitude to multilateral intelligence liaison outside Europe: supportive of liaison in principle as a means of fostering anti-

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[156] FCO 141/14846, Greenhill to Goode, 24 September 1958.
[157] Hashimoto, *The Twilight of the British Empire,* pp. 93-94, 107-113.

communist unity, but suspicious of liaison in practice for political and security reasons (the latter often being a mask for cultural prejudices).

Summary

By August 1950, when Malcolm MacDonald held his first 'Cold War Committee' at Bukit Serene, the Cold War in Southeast Asia was beginning to evolve. The establishment of the PRC in 1949 and outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 – although occurring in East Asia – had a noticeable impact on intelligence practices in Southeast Asia. As well as generating an urgent need for intelligence about China itself, the possibility of Chinese communist expansion gave added impetus to Britain's policy of supporting a non-communist buffer zone in the upper arc of Southeast Asia. However, Britain lacked the capacity or the political will to follow through with major defence commitments.

Regional intelligence became more closely integrated under the auspices of the Commissioner General. It also became more intertwined with national foreign policy objectives. The growing complexity of the Cold War in Asia required the intelligence community to grow in scope and activity, although ventures into open source intelligence did little to upset the hierarchy of status which typified the existence of a regional-national intelligence community linking Singapore to London. Moreover, service intelligence departments increasingly took their lead from SIFE and SIS. At a conference of Far Eastern military intelligence representatives in March 1950, SIFE experts were called in to outline the situation and provide direction to guide military attachés' intake of information.[158]

The alignment of regional and national actors is also apparent in how Singapore-based intelligence agencies provided an opportunity to aid in the implementation of foreign policy. Through proactive counter-subversion and intelligence diplomacy, agencies including SIFE and RIO supported British policy to encourage resistance to communism in the upper arc. They also aided local British regimes such as the Singapore colonial government by helping to disrupt

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[158] WO 208/4835, Report of Far East Military Attaché's Conference, March 1950.

the flow of ideas from China. Providing assistance to Asian nations and working with Western allies in the clandestine sphere enabled Britain to engage with the Cold War whilst avoiding major commitments. Consequently, although intelligence diplomacy largely failed to improve intelligence collection due to the multiple obstacles to intelligence sharing, it was more successful as an avenue for supporting foreign policy.

6. Singapore security and communist subversion

The year 1950 ended with a pyrrhic victory for the Singapore Special Branch but a public failure for the police as a whole. This discrepancy speaks to an important issue in understanding the methods, culture and effectiveness of Special Branch during the 1950s: the primacy of their intelligence or policing functions. The arrest of the MCP Town Committee severely dislocated the communist underground but did not obliterate it. Like the hydra, the MCP regrew new structures and adapted. To prevent a return to the violent campaign of spring-summer 1950, Special Branch needed to gather intelligence on this evolving threat and take action to enforce the rule of law. Their success does not necessarily imply that Special Branch had an effective security intelligence culture. As this chapter examines, many of their achievements were less the result of directed intelligence operations than mundane policing procedures complemented by good fortune. Moving against the Town Committee sacrificed important sources of intelligence. Further compounded by the shifting patterns of MCP organisation, the British administration remained in the dark about the communist underground for at least two years.

In fulfilling its functions, Special Branch was assisted by other security intelligence actors: SIFE and MI5. The mid 1950s saw major changes to how these agencies gave assistance to the colonies. In Singapore itself, SIFE removed the position of SLO. Instead they embedded officers within Special Branch to improve the intelligence culture of the police. Meanwhile, in the metropole, a landmark report on colonial security by General Sir Gerald Templer prompted the creation of an Intelligence and Security Department to make the Colonial Office more intelligence-minded. MI5 Head Office assisted through expanding its provision of training and advice, both of which benefitted Singapore directly. This increasing involvement by the regional-national community in local intelligence affairs was symptomatic of an appreciation of the differing intelligence culture between MI5 and Special Branch, as well as growing concern for their future access to intelligence. Decolonisation became as important an imperative as the Emergency in driving Singapore policy (and national policy towards Singapore) during this period. However, security was one area upon which the British were unwilling to compromise. The willingness of Lim Yew Hock to work with the

colonial government and share their security agenda was vital in facilitating the road to 1959.

These developments in intelligence occurred during a period of fundamental transition for Singapore. The first elections for an Executive and Legislative Council to assist the Governor were held in March 1948. Gimson's administration was hindered in implementing political development by the Emergency, but under Governor John Fearns Nicoll (1952-55), Singapore embarked on more substantial progress towards self-government. In July 1953, Nicoll appointed a commission under Sir George Rendel to undertake a comprehensive review of the colony's constitution. The commission's report led to the inauguration of the Rendel Constitution in 1955 which replaced the Executive Council with a Cabinet-style Council of Ministers. A 32-person Legislative Assembly was formed, with 25 seats up for election. The largest party in the Assembly would take the six seats for elected representatives on the Council of Ministers (the rest being appointed by the Governor), and its party leader would serve under the Governor as Chief Minister. According to the Singapore historian C. M. Turnbull, the Rendel Constitution 'was designed to stimulate an appetite for self-government among seemingly reluctant Singaporeans'. However, it had the effect of awakening and accelerating these desires at a greater pace than Britain anticipated.[1]

The election of April 1955 was won by the Labour Front, ensuring its leader David Marshall became the first Chief Minister. In April 1956, Marshall led a delegation to London for negotiations over Singapore's next steps towards independence. However, unwilling to compromise on issues including the control of intelligence and security, Marshall's mission failed and led to his resignation. The new Chief Minister, Lim Yew Hock, was more closely aligned with Britain over security, and reached a compromise agreement with London in March 1957. In August 1958 Britain passed the State of Singapore Act to transform the colony into a self-governing state with a high degree of domestic autonomy. Self-government became a practical reality following the general election of May 1959.

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[1] Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*, p. 259.

During this transition, security intelligence attained even greater important. In 1956, MI5 described Singapore as 'the colonial territory of vital importance to the United Kingdom in the Far East'.[2] This importance was derived not only from Singapore's position as a strategic base and administrative centre. Equally important were the rapid changes within Singapore's borders which had implications for the broader conduct of British intelligence. The next two chapters examine how local, regional and national intelligence networks worked to combat the communist threat and bring about a peaceful decolonisation which would continue to meet Britain's defence and intelligence requirements. This chapter focuses on the subversive threat of the MCP underground organisation from 1951-55, as well as local manifestations of Cold War threats from around the region. Chapter seven looks more directly at the constitutional process, the communist united front and the party which emerged triumphant in 1959: the People's Action Party.

Patterns of intelligence organisation

During the first few years of the Emergency, the regional-national intelligence community had little direct involvement or interest in day-to-day developments in Singapore. The local intelligence machine operated with only minor interference, although it could – and did – liaise with MI5 representatives to draw upon their advice and expertise. The local intelligence community was distinct from the regional and national levels because of its hierarchical separation, the different working culture of Special Branch as part of the process of enforcing law and order, and its inwards-looking priorities. At the regional-national level, security intelligence was less engaged with purely local issues, had to compete for influence with other intelligence activities, and was non-executive, focused on collating, assessing and disseminating intelligence.

However, the evolving situation in the early to mid-1950s required the regional-national intelligence community to keep pace. Intelligence actors became increasingly involved in the clandestine implementation of policy. The spectre of

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[2] CO 1035/118, Review of subversive influences in the colonial territories (MI5 draft), 25 May 1956.

decolonisation, and the continuing weakness of information collection, meant they became increasingly interested in local intelligence processes. Meanwhile, the local intelligence machine amended its focus and showed growing interest in external developments which had the potential to impact upon their remit. By the mid-1950s, therefore, there were signs of greater unity across the British intelligence system in Singapore.

Special Branch remained the main producer of local security intelligence. The principal sections dealing with the communist threat were the Chinese Internal and Chinese External sections. The former was primarily concerned with the MCP and was commanded by European officers in the early 1950s. In contrast, the Chinese External section was led by a locally-recruited officer, Khaw Kai Boh, from 1950-53. This section studied movements which had ties with communist China. Khaw was a Singapore-born Chinese who joined Field Security as an intelligence officer during the British Military Administration. During the MSS years he had specialised in investigating criminal secret societies such as the Ang Bin Huay triad. Khaw was the highest-ranking locally-recruited officer in Special Branch and was promoted to Director in August 1957.[3]

Other Special Branch sub-divisions included an English-Speaking Intelligentsia section, a Travel Control section and an Indian section led by the long-serving officer Ahmad Khan. Born in modern-day Pakistan, Khan started work as a part-time Arabic translator for the Singapore Special Branch in 1934 until he was recruited by Alan Blades to help counter Japanese espionage. Unlike many European officers who escaped to India, Khan was captured during the Second World War. Following the restoration of British authority he joined MSS and then Special Branch.[4] A broader base of recruitment than the rest of the (predominantly Malay and European) police contributed to Special Branch's early successes in dealing with the MCP. In the 1930s, Special Branch recruited Chinese detectives who had previously been members of the MCP and could draw upon their unique knowledge of the communities which they needed to gather intelligence upon.[5] Special Branch proved committed to training Asian officers to

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[3] FCO 141/14950, Khaw Kai Boh to Black, 5 October 1957.
[4] NAS 000150, Interview with Ahmad Khan, reel 1.
[5] NAS 001745, Interview with Nigel Morris, reel 2.

prepare them for leadership roles. Both Khaw Kai Boh and Ahmad Khan benefitted from intensive training in London with MI5 and the Metropolitan Police.[6]

Charting the activities of Special Branch during this period is possible because of the release of large volumes of their reports in the Migrated Archives. It is worth noting that these are mostly what may be termed 'basic descriptive' reports: Special Branch's weekly, fortnightly or monthly summaries of events for dissemination to the services, SLO, police authorities or colonial government. This type of report commented on the current state of information known about the MCP and describe noteworthy events such as police raids. They rarely gave more analytical or speculative assessment of what this intelligence means. This is a key distinction between the reports disseminated by Special Branch and those distributed by SIFE and the JIC(FE). Arguably, Special Branch had less need to interpret their intelligence for their users. Because of their dual operational culture as an intelligence collector and police enforcement actor, they were themselves the primary authority for acting on their own intelligence. One could say that Special Branch had less need to convince its users of their interpretations: merely to keep them informed of their activities.

From November 1950 until August 1957, Special Branch was directed by Alan Blades. Blades had been responsible for counter-espionage in the pre-war Special Branch. Escaping to Ceylon during the war, he joined the Far Eastern Bureau of the Ministry of Information, and in 1946 was promoted to Assistant Director of MSS. Following the creation of the new Special Branch in 1948, he became its operational chief under the overall leadership of Nigel Morris. Blades became the longest-serving Director of the Singapore Special Branch during the Malayan Emergency period of 1948-60. He was described by his own deputy, Richard Corridon, as a man of great ability and integrity who believed communism to be inherently evil.[7] A similar appreciation was held by Lee Kuan Yew, who recalled Blades as being 'a tall, taciturn man with a white goatee and

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[6] NAS 000150, Interview with Ahmad Khan, reel 5.
[7] NAS 000044, Interview with Richard Corridon, reel 6.

glasses […] he was well aware of the dangers the communists posed, and probably thought I was too close to them for my own good'.[8]

Whilst Blades was a highly capable and experienced intelligence officer, well-suited to the leadership of Special Branch, his leadership was not without problems. During a major review of colonial security in 1955, General Templer criticised the Singapore Special Branch for being a 'one-man show' which lacked a full complement of senior officers.[9]

This was further complicated by the political context of 'Malayanisation', as the longest-serving officers were expatriates. In 1956 a Malayanisation Commission suggested that the police force could be 'Malayanised' within three years without loss of efficiency. Commissioner of Police Nigel Morris regarded this as absurd. As an average, the most senior local officers (such as Khaw Kai Boh) had nine years less experience than senior expatriates such as Blades or Khan.[10] Political pressures to promote locally-recruited officers had to be balanced against the need for experience and efficiency.

Whilst the nature of Special Branch changed, the system for liaison between MI5 and the local security machinery also adapted to the evolving political situation. The established model of the Security Liaison Officer (SLO) was temporarily abandoned in Singapore and the Federation from 1954-56. H/SIFE Courtenay Young believed that the two primary functions of the SLO – providing advice to colonial governments and collating locally produced intelligence – were incompatible. SLOs were supposed to advise their attached Governments about the efficiency of the local intelligence machine upon which the SLOs were dependent for providing intelligence back to SIFE. The advisory and collation roles were therefore at odds, with SLOs deprived from unrestricted access to Special Branch files due to suspicions of MI5 interference.[11] This emphasised the lack of organisational integration between the local and regional levels of intelligence. It also indicated a cultural distinction, as both levels were inherently suspicious of the other. This is unsurprising given the role of MI5 and

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[8] Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story*, p. 329.
[9] FCO 141/14867, Black to Lennox-Boyd, 6 August 1955.
[10] FCO 141/15295, Undated memorandum by Director of Personnel, 'Malayanisation', c. 1956.
[11] KV 4/425, Memorandum by Young, 'The Basic Problems of SIFE Area Posts', 25 September 1953.

SIFE in canvassing support for the removal of MSS, in which many senior Special Branch officers had served. Meanwhile, local intelligence collection remained one of SIFE's greatest hindrances. In response, Young removed the SLOs from Malaya and Singapore. Instead, SIFE officers were seconded directly to Special Branch from 1954 to create a more effective conduit of information and provide more productive assistance.[12]

This was underpinned by high-handed logic about the perceived distinction between security and political intelligence. Young argued that 'it is idle to expect that any Special Branches out here, or indeed I should have thought anywhere, could reach the high standard of organisation and method achieved by the Security Service'. SIFE advice was seen as invaluable in persuading Special Branch officers to think 'more like intelligence officers and less like policemen'.[13] Young's comments showed that earlier MI5 attitudes about colonial intelligence still carried capital. From SIFE's perspective, the intelligence culture of their organisation was fundamentally different from that of Special Branch. Ironically, it could be argued that the Singapore Special Branch was Britain's most effective (if highly imperfect) security intelligence producer in the Far East. However, action taken to preserve government authority – rounding up the Town Committee – proved detrimental to the intelligence process. This alludes to an important point about the character of Special Branch. Its integral position within the police and colonial structure meant that its long-term intelligence functions were sometimes sacrificed for the sake of effective enforcement. SIFE and MI5 did not face this problem of conflicting priorities. Special Branch was a security intelligence agency, but one of different character to SIFE or MI5.

Young's reorganisation achieved mixed results. The first SIFE officer implanted into Special Branch, Christopher Crace, struggled to achieve anything meaningful. First appointed to the Research section, after mismanagement and a lack of direction he was moved to the Chinese External section. Crace was tasked with producing a chart showing CCP contacts in Singapore. However, this was far from what Young had in mind, and Crace felt that 'I cannot believe that I have

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[12] KV 4/425, Memorandum by Young, 'The Basic Problems of SIFE Area Posts', 25 September 1953.
[13] KV 4/427, Memorandum by Young, 'Intelligence Organisation', 22 August 1955.

been of any use to SIFE and only of doubtful value to Special Branch'.[14] This problem appears to have arisen from the use of SIFE liaison officers as another pair of hands doing ordinary Special Branch work. When SIFE advisors were allowed to fulfil their intended functions, their impact was more positive. Following the Templer report on colonial security in April 1955, the SIFE advisor helped Special Branch respond to Templer's recommendations by helping to oversee rapid internal reorganisations.[15]

Young's successor as H/SIFE, Dick Thistlethwaite, dispensed with this experiment and reinstated the SLOs.[16] He thereby responded to growing metropolitan pressure to create a system whereby Britain would continue to have access to locally-produced security intelligence after self-government was inevitably conceded. The SLO designate for Singapore, R. C. Symonds, agreed that Malayanisation of the police was inevitable. Therefore it was advantageous to cement the position of the new SLOs, creating a form of liaison to which less objection could be raised than the previous system of embedding British intelligence officers in what would soon become a genuinely Singaporean Special Branch.[17] Bill Magan, head of MI5's counter-subversion E Branch, added the suggestion that SLOs be encouraged to duplicate Special Branch records in a separate card index to guard against a future rupture of liaison following decolonisation.[18] Thistlethwaite hoped the restored SLOs would provide analysis of security intelligence which affected only their territory and thereby leave SIFE to concentrate on information of broader regional significance.[19] This was a fundamental rejection of Young's logic which tried to bridge the gap between the local and regional levels of assessment.

Back in the metropole, imperial security intelligence was scrutinised by the Templer report, published on 23 April 1955. As well as offering suggestions for individual colonies, Templer supported measures to instil more 'intelligence-mindedness' within the Colonial Office. In Templer's words, 'security

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[14] KV 4/425, Memorandum by Crace, 'Research Section of Singapore Special Branch', 10 September 1953.
[15] FCO 141/14867, Black to Lennox-Boyd, 6 August 1955.
[16] KV 4/427, Memorandum by Thistlethwaite, 'SIFE's Future', 30 September 1955.
[17] KV 4/428, Memorandum by R. C. Symonds (SLO Designate, Singapore), 'Note on the Proposed Reopening of a Security Liaison Office, Singapore', 15 May 1956.
[18] KV 4/428, Magan to Thistlethwaite, 5 June 1956.
[19] KV 4/428, Thistlethwaite to Magan, 10 May 1956.

intelligence has I think come to be regarded as a kind of spicy condiment added to the Secretariat hot-pot by a supernumerary and possibly superfluous cook, instead of being a carefully planned and expertly served dish of its own'.[20] These criticisms were not too dissimilar to those levied by Courtenay Young against the Singapore Special Branch for behaving too much like policeman and not enough like intelligence officers. Templer extended this critique to the entire colonial establishment. As a result of Templer's landmark report, a new Colonial Office Intelligence and Security Department (ISD) was created in London and measures were taken to better integrate the Colonial Office with the JIC. In addition, deputies were appointed to the Security Intelligence Advisor. This was an MI5 officer appointed to the Colonial Office to fulfil similar functions to SLOs in individual colonies. Since 1954, the first incumbent was former SIFE counter-espionage specialist Alec MacDonald.

However, the creation of ISD and strengthening of the MI5 presence within the Colonial Office did not have an immediate effect upon national intelligence. The Colonial Office remained reluctant to change, and bureaucratic tensions ensued. Colonial planners feared the reduction of complex and locally distinct problems to the JIC's Cold War world-view.[21]

Nevertheless, ISD created more opportunities for metropolitan intervention in local intelligence organisation. In December 1955, Duncan Watson of ISD visited Singapore. He concluded that the counter-subversion organisation as a whole was too clandestine. He worried that there was a tendency to view counter-subversion as purely a security matter rather than something to which all branches of government could contribute in their everyday business.[22] Singapore government saw counter-subversion as involving three areas: counter-propaganda, positive efforts to improve living conditions, and unattributable clandestine activities (including security intelligence gathering). However, the organisation

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[20] CAB 21/2925, Report on colonial security by General Sir Gerald Templer, 23 April 1955.

[21] Rory Cormac, 'A Whitehall "Showdown"? Colonial Office-Joint Intelligence Committee Relations in the Mid-1950s', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39(2) (2011), 249-267 (p. 254).

[22] This definition of counter-subversion is comparable to the understanding of propaganda put forward by Kumar Ramakrishna: as not just a specialised field but something to which all visible government actions either directly or indirectly contributed. See: Kumar Ramakrishna, *Emergency Propaganda: The Winning of Malayan Hearts and Minds 1948-1958* (Richmond: Curzon, 2002), pp. 15-16.

was mainly *sub rosa* and geared around the latter. Local officials did not believe that positive overt measures would have sufficient effect in time to be useful. In contrast, ISD placed greater emphasis on long-term education and counter-measures which would gradually contain communist influence.[23] This highlights the tension between the national view, where the Colonial Office could afford to take a long-term approach, and the pressure felt by local officials to provide security in the present.

The JIC(London) chairman, Patrick Dean, also visited Singapore in February 1956. In contrast to Duncan Watson, Dean emphasised the increasing importance of clandestine measures. His view embodied how the regional-national intelligence community became increasingly involved in policy through propaganda, covert action and intelligence diplomacy. The Singapore Governor, by this point Robert Brown Black, was more worried about the implications of such measures for the constitutional process. Dean and the JIC(FE) chairman, Andrew Gilchrist, tried to mollify the Governor through explaining that Britain preferred grey to black forms of propaganda and covert action.[24] Standing apart from Dean and Gilchrist, ISD endorsed the Governor's view on the need for extremely delicate handling of clandestine activities.[25] This disagreement was not an issue between the three levels of administration, but between intelligence actors across the three levels and their colonial consumers in Singapore and London. Intelligence officials remained more concerned with communism and its threat to both Cold War strategic concerns and imperial security, whilst colonial managers were more concerned with the uncertainty of political developments.

In April 1956, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Alan Lennox-Boyd, sent out instructions to Governors to review their intelligence machines. Lennox-Boyd emphasised that the British government attached great importance to retaining influence after independence, and expected colonial administrations to help their SLOs build towards a stable future position.[26]

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[23] CO 968/123, Minute by N. Duncan Watson, 22 February 1956.
[24] CO 968/123, Record of a meeting held at Government House, 2 February 1956.
[25] CO 968/123, Carstairs (ISD) to Dean, March 1956.
[26] CO 1035/39, Circular from Lennox-Boyd, 28 April 1956.

In response, Governor Black reviewed the intelligence machinery in Singapore. He agreed that they needed to reform the assessments machinery to reflect the advanced constitutional state of Singapore and be more suitable for retention in a self-governing territory. To that end, the old Local Intelligence Committee was replaced with a new Singapore Intelligence Committee chaired by the Chief Secretary. This made twice monthly reports to the Governor and the elected Chief Minister, but – as agreed by Lim Yew Hock after he replaced the less amenable David Marshall – these would not be circulated to other elected ministers. Moreover, arrangements were made for other intelligence to be submitted privately to the Governor's Secretary for when certain subjects were deemed unsuitable for the knowledge of the Chief Minister.[27] Although Lim Yew Hock's agenda was more closely aligned with the anti-communist goals of the British security regime, he was not completely trusted.

In addition to providing training and continuous liaison, MI5 Head Office also helped to coordinate metropolitan security initiatives. For example, in early 1954, the JIC(London) voiced concern over the vulnerability of key buildings across the Empire to eavesdropping devices. MI5 acted on these concerns by instructing SLOs to conduct investigations in their respective colonies.[28] Following these investigations, the SLO in Singapore reported no signs of any Soviet or satellite intelligence activity of any sort, including eavesdropping. Little was known to MI5 or SIFE about the Chinese intelligence service, so they could not generalise about its organisation, methods or technical competence. So far, no local activities had come to light which could be directly attributed to a centralised intelligence organisation, despite long-term counter-intelligence investigations against the Bank of China (the natural cover for any PRC intelligence activity and only 400 yards from the government offices at Empress Place). The risk was assessed as slight.[29]

However, protective security remained an under-valued aspect of security intelligence until further prodding from MI5. In 1957, MI5 sent counter-sabotage expert Mr. Fenton to Singapore. Fenton was seconded to SIFE to provide advice

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[27] CO 1035/39, Black to Lennox-Boyd, 3 August 1956.
[28] CO 1035/2, Clayton (MI5) to Barton (Colonial Office), 11 January 1954.
[29] CO 1035/2, Report by SLO Singapore on eavesdropping enquiries, 9 June 1954.

in this field to British dependencies and the newly independent Federation of Malaya.[30] Special Branch agreed to appoint a serving officer as part-time counter-sabotage officer for the Singapore government: something that the SLOs had been fruitlessly encouraging since the re-establishment of the post three years before. To carry out this decision, an Inspector T. T. Nathan was attached to Mr Fenton for training.[31] In this regard, metropolitan intervention from MI5 helped SIFE and its SLOs introduce greater standardisation in security intelligence practices across the Empire.

The 1950s were a period of experimentation and change in security intelligence organisation. Whilst the Cold War threat remained constant, Singapore's constitutional progress provided new political considerations. As the local intelligence machine came under pressure for 'Malayanisation', the regional-national intelligence community became increasingly concerned with ensuring a continued flow of intelligence and promoting the development of a security intelligence culture more akin to their own patterns. As a result of these sometimes competing political and intelligence imperatives, Special Branch was gradually 'Malayanised', the SLO was removed and then reinstated, and the Singapore intelligence machine came under increasing national scrutiny.

A war of attrition

Against this backdrop of shifting organisational patterns, local security operations continued to focus on the MCP. Special Branch struggled to recover from difficulties in intelligence production and remained largely in the dark as to the state of the communist underground. The successes they achieved against the MCP underground from 1951 are implicit of a working culture influenced as much by their status as a police division as by their composition as a security intelligence producer. Although Special Branch was creating security intelligence (contrary to what some high-handed MI5 officials believed), the way it was

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[30] FCO 141/15174, Circular from Secretary of State for the Colonies, 20 August 1957.
[31] FCO 141/15174, Russell Jones (SLO) to Goodwin (Governor's Secretary), 10 October 1957; FCO 141/15174, Minute by Secretary of Defence (Singapore), 19 October 1957.

generating and using that intelligence was different to regional-national security intelligence agencies.

Following the detention of the two remaining members of the Singapore Town Committee in December 1950, Special Branch continued their record of successful action against the MCP underground. On 4 January 1951, they arrested 25 suspects connected with an English-speaking group of the ABL. This came to be known as the 'university case', and involved high-profile detainees including Devan Nair and James Puthucheary, who later became important figures in the communist open united front. Their arrest was the result of long-term Special Branch investigations into the production of MCP English language propaganda within the University of Malaya.[32]

This action was a timely reminder that the decentralised cell structure of the MCP was not easily crippled. Despite the arrest of the Town Committee, the threat of continued sabotage and violence, as well as the flow of propaganda, was undiminished. On 26 January 1951, the police raided an MCP communications centre on Queen Street in downtown Singapore. This was the result of a month-long surveillance operation and tip-offs from secret sources. Diaries recovered from the scene proved this to be the hideout of a gang involved in acts of arson and identification card thefts. The Workers Protection Corps (also known by the Special Branch misnomer of 'Special Service Corps') evidently remained at large.[33]

Nevertheless, although the potential threat of terrorism remained unabated in the perceptions of the British administration, 1951 marked a lull in MCP-inspired violence. The Secretary for Internal Affairs, J. C. Barry, attributed this to 'good information and firm action': an effective intelligence processing machine and the efficient translation of this into enforcement operations.[34] However, these two imperatives could sometimes be conflictual. Barry was under no illusions that this was anything but a 'war of attrition'.[35] Successful police action relied upon good intelligence, but taking action could mean the loss of future intelligence.

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[32] FCO 141/15632, Singapore political report for January 1951.
[33] FCO 141/15660, Services Intelligence Liaison Committee (SILC) report, 30 January 1951.
[34] FCO 141/15632, Singapore political report for July 1951.
[35] FCO 141/15632, Singapore political report for August 1951.

Detaining one of the members of the Singapore Town Committee in April 1950 necessitated the sacrifice of valuable sources of information. The detention of the remaining members in December exacerbated this intelligence problem. Even though the Town Committee secretary, Ah Kim, began divulging information in April 1951, events had moved on since his arrest. The value of any intelligence he could give was limited.[36] To some extent this was counteracted by the recruitment of the other Town Committee member, Guo Ren Huey, as a Special Branch asset, having a demoralising impact on the MCP underground. MCP propagandist Fong Chong Pik recalled how Party security became one of the most serious problems faced by the MCP in the 1950s and that treachery and leakages occurred frequently.[37] Ironically, Fong probably over-estimated the capabilities of Special Branch at the time. Although they continued to secure useful tactical intelligence which enabled specific raids, they struggled to gather information about the overall make-up of the communist underground. In this regard, continuity with the earlier years of the Emergency is apparent. The year 1950 was the anomaly which saw Special Branch generating useful strategic intelligence about MCP intentions and capabilities. Both before and afterwards, they remained essentially reactive and reliant upon very confined tactical intelligence to maintain pressure on the communist organisation. As Colonial Secretary W. L. Blythe noted, 'successful action, however, always tends to reduce, or destroy altogether, important and intimate sources of information and the course of the next resurgence of organised communist activity cannot necessarily be foretold and forestalled'.[38]

During this becalmed period, Special Branch enjoyed further success against the propaganda wing of the MCP. On 11 July 1951, they captured the Freedom Press in an isolated rural area. Alan Blades noted that this was no easy operation, involving difficult terrain for maintaining observation, and thus operations were necessarily hurried. As a result, only two people were arrested and the head of the Freedom Press unit, Eu Chooi Yip, was able to escape.[39] Eu's assistant, Fong Chong Pik, suspected that this raid was brought about through an MCP traitor tipping off Special Branch. However, he had no evidence to support

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[36] FCO 141/15660, Special Branch weekly summary, 28 April 1951.
[37] Fong, *Memoirs of a Malayan Communist Revolutionary*, p. 95.
[38] CO 1022/59, Memorandum by Blythe, 'Emergency Legislation and the Emergency in Singapore', 10 December 1951.
[39] FCO 141/14485, Memorandum by Blades, 12 July 1951.

this judgement, and admitted it could equally have been the result of regular police surveillance noticing suspicious comings and goings.[40] Recovering the physical printing templates and machines enabled Special Branch to produce their own issue of *Freedom News* with articles by MCP defectors as a form of counter-propaganda.[41]

The figure of Eu Chooi Yip sheds light on the intelligence gaps faced in this period. Examination of documents seized in the Freedom Press raid led Special Branch to believe that he was a more important figure than previously suspected. They wondered whether Eu might be a new leader of the Town Committee.[42] However, there was, in reality, no Town Committee, as the MCP never resurrected that system. The fact that Special Branch did not know this, and were still speculating as to whom could be Town Committee members into 1951 and 1952, highlights the poor state of intelligence about the organisation of the MCP.

Indeed, an element of luck pervaded some of the notable Special Branch successes. Others were the result not of security intelligence operations but general preventative policing. On 11 June, an ordinary police radio patrol arrested a suspicious man who turned out to be Wong Fook Kwong, an MCP district leader who went by various aliases including Tit Fung or the 'Iron Spearhead'.[43]

Whilst Special Branch appeared to know very little about the MCP, the MCP seemed to greatly improve its intelligence capabilities against Special Branch. In April 1952, a long-standing Special Branch informant was assassinated. The police blamed poor security in places of detention, from where they struggled to prevent detainees smuggling messages back to their comrades. Although the informant had out-lived his usefulness, his shocking murder was a signal that the British did not have a monopoly on security intelligence.[44] In contrast to the situation in 1950, when MCP attacks were concentrated on high-profile government figures or capitalist establishments, the police became the

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[40] Fong, *Memoirs of a Malayan Communist Revolutionary*, p. 96.
[41] Ramakrishna, *Freedom News*, p. 331.
[42] FCO 141/15661, Special Branch weekly summary, 28 July 1951.
[43] FCO 141/15658, Special Branch weekly summary, 14 June 1952. On Tit Fung's remarkable career as an MCP activist, see: Clague, *Iron Spearhead*.
[44] FCO 141/15658, Special Branch weekly summary, 19 April 1952.

major target for the Workers Protection Corps. This showed on the one hand the success of Special Branch in instilling fear of their intelligence potential within the MCP, but also the poor state of current intelligence as they were unable to prevent these attacks or round up those responsible. On 11 September 1952, a young communist sympathiser dropped a grenade into the car of Special Branch Chief Inspector Lau Siew Foo. Lau and two others were seriously injured although managed to recover. However, despite a $25,000 reward for information, the assailant escaped justice. Special Branch believed he had stowed away on a ship bound for Hong Kong, but this proved to be a false lead.[45]

This prevailing state of attrition began to change in autumn 1952. A random police spot-check of bus passengers on 12 November found a Chinese man acting nervously. On investigation, he was found to possess several MCP documents which led to the discovery of a major headquarters near Jurong Road in rural western Singapore.[46] Raiding this address provided Special Branch with a vast array of documents, allowing them to piece together a picture of the MCP organisation for the first time since December 1950. At the same time, analysis of documents seized from a communist courier killed in Johore (Malaya) and bound for Singapore cast light on MCP intentions.[47]

The intelligence from these actions proved that, contrary to Special Branch suspicions, the Singapore Town Committee had never been reformed. Instead, the MCP operated its underground presence in Singapore through lower-level structures under the supervision of its Southern Bureau in Johore. The largest of these new organisations seemed to be a Singapore Town and Rural Directing Committee, a successor to the old District Committees which previously were subordinate to the Town Committee. The man arrested on the bus was one of the leaders of this organisation. Documents seized and translated by Special Branch showed that, since its inception in early 1952, the new committee had made little progress with its allotted tasks and suffered from poor morale. All this new

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[45] FCO 141/15658, Special Branch weekly summaries, 13 and 20 September 1952; 'Bombster: $25,000 Reward', *The Singapore Standard*, 16 September 1952.
[46] FCO 141/15659, Special Branch weekly summary, 15 November 1952.
[47] CO 1022/250, Nicoll to Secretary of State, 18 November 1952.

information was used to rebuild Special Branch's personality charts and registry to prepare for future operations against the communist underground.[48]

In addition, the documentation seized in Johore in October 1952 showed that the MCP had considerably changed strategy since 1950. This decision was taken in a directive of October 1951, but British intelligence had previously been uncertain whether these 'October directives' had been transmitted to Singapore.[49] The courier documents confirmed that the Singapore branches of the Party were aware of and following central policy. This new communist campaign entailed greater awareness of the political nature of insurgency. In Singapore, this meant a turn away from mass violence in favour of a political struggle with only sporadic violent operations against the security forces. This central policy change explained the increased targeting of police officers and informers in 1952. Moreover, the Central Executive Committee advised separating the Workers Protection Corps, concentrated in the rural areas, from the political organisation in the city. Greater emphasis was placed upon the security of Party personnel and not attracting undue attention to long-term penetration efforts through short-term acts of violence.[50]

Throughout 1953, Special Branch continued to accumulate more intelligence about the MCP underground in Singapore. This enabled ever more effective action to be taken against these remnants of the pre-1950 organisation. However, there also remained inherent dangers in taking action against the communist underground. As the police became more successful in acting against the MCP, the Party moved further and further towards a decentralised and fragmented organisation, more resistant to police action.

Following the shooting of a police informant in January 1953, Special Branch rounded up eight members of a previously unknown MCP organisation known as 'O' District.[51] Continuing analysis of incoming intelligence (mostly from captured documents or casual informants) showed that Tit Fung – the MCP leader arrested in June 1952 – was the commander of this 'O' District. Whilst this

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[48] CO 1022/250, Special Branch memorandum, 'The MCP in Singapore', 22 December 1952.
[49] On the importance of the directives, see: Hack, 'The Malayan Emergency as Counterinsurgency Paradigm', pp. 389-390.
[50] FCO 141/15952/2, Pan-Malayan Review, November 1952.
[51] FCO 141/15962, Special Branch weekly summary, 14 February 1953.

should have been an important coup for Special Branch, the realisation of the importance of this detainee was marred by his sudden escape. Recovering from a bout of chronic tuberculosis in the hospital lock-up, the young Tit Fung was sprung from custody by a party led by a woman believed to be his mother.[52]

The breakthroughs of October-November 1952 relied largely upon luck and general policing. A year later, Special Branch achieved a more significant coup against the MCP by processing intelligence gathered from informants and surveillance operations. Assisted by their Federation counterparts, they carried out a week-long operation which netted four key arrests. Those arrested were the head of the Workers Protection Corps in Singapore, two female couriers linking Singapore to the MCP Southern Bureau, and a woman named Lam Wei Ling (alias Ah Shu), who was the current leader of the Town and Rural Directing Committee.[53]

From an extensive mass of documents uncovered in the course of these arrests, often tiny rolls of paper concealed in domestic items, Special Branch accumulated a more accurate appreciation of the communist underground. The underground then consisted of four main structures. The Town and Rural Directing Committee was best known to Special Branch. In addition, there was the 'O' District which used a structure of sub-branches instead of the standard communist cell structure. Thirdly, an 'A' District appeared to be an offshoot of 'O' District about which little was discovered at this time. Finally, a revived Freedom Press unit was the smallest element of the communist underground. The total strength of this network was estimated at around 2000 persons, but only 30 were full Party members. The majority were either ABL members, active sympathisers (who helped to collect subscriptions and distribute propaganda) or passive sympathisers (who just paid subscriptions).[54]

Following this new information, on 28 January 1954, the police detained a man named Wan Fung who had replaced Ah Shu as the overall leader of the MCP underground. His arrest was possible because of the methodical card index which

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[52] FCO 141/15962, Special Branch weekly summary, 7 March 1953.
[53] FCO 141/15952/1, Singapore Police Intelligence Journal, 31 October 1953; FCO 141/15951, Supplement to Police Intelligence Journal 3/54, 'The MCP in Singapore', 20 March 1954.
[54] FCO 141/15637, LIC review of internal security, 1 October 1953.

Special Branch had created using the intelligence gathered in 1952-53, providing a registry of all suspected communists and everything known about them.[55] This was demonstrative of a sound intelligence process. Systematic interrogation of Wan Fung confirmed previous intelligence as well as revealing some of its deficiencies. Crucially, the MCP was left disorganised, with the Town and Rural Committee having collapsed following the arrests of October 1953. 'O' District had also been severely dislocated and reformed as a lower-grade 'E' Branch. Because of the fragmentation of the MCP, less was known about 'A' District, which was thought be focused on the penetration of education and the intelligentsia. The education field proved crucial to the MCP's survival despite increasing police pressure.[56]

From 1954, the MCP underground network declined in importance, both for the communist movement itself and in the anxieties of British intelligence. Greater attention was devoted to CCP influences, as well as the growing 'communist front' of penetrated trade unions, students' organisations and political parties. This front movement was separate from the underground remnants of the MCP. As Singapore moved closer to self-governance following the inauguration of the Rendel Constitution in 1955, the open front held more potential than the beleaguered hard-core underground for achieving the MCP's goals.

Moreover, Special Branch continued to pick off underground leaders as they gained the tactical intelligence to identify and locate them. On 9 July 1954, Tit Fung was re-arrested. Now in charge of Party communications with the Federation (and a drug addict), his detention and eventual deportation to China left the Singapore underground out-of-touch with the central organisation.[57] A few days earlier, Sam Kung, the 'E' Branch secretary, had been arrested. Intelligence gained from his interrogation identified a mysterious 'Comrade D' as the latest Party leader in Singapore, and led to police raids upon three farms which Sam Kung had purchased as rural bases for the Party. In total, 30 pigs, 79 ducks and 33 chickens were seized: not an inconsequential detail in the laborious Special Branch intelligence files, but a vital source of food to underground MCP

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[55] FCO 141/15952/1, Singapore Police Intelligence Journal, 28 February 1954.
[56] Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution*, p. 77.
[57] FCO 141/15952/1, Singapore Police Intelligence Journal, 31 January 1955; Peter Clague, *Iron Spearhead*, p. 140, 152.

members.[58] The identity of 'Comrade D' was finally established in December 1954. He was a 24 year old student, expelled from the Chinese High School, named Ng Men Chiang (alias Chow Kong).[59] The final decisive blow to the MCP underground was the arrest of the new secretary of 'E' Branch in March 1955. Neither 'E' Branch nor the remnants of the Workers Protection Corps recovered from this succession of leadership eliminations.[60] Consequently, by the time of the inauguration of the Rendel Constitution, the MCP underground had been decisively dealt with. This enabled Special Branch and its partners to shift their focus to the communist front movement and its links to new nationalist parties.

As a footnote to this struggle against the communist underground, the leader of 'A' Branch (formerly 'A' District) was arrested on 1 February 1959. This leader was a 33 year old flower-seller named Woo Chong Poh. Under interrogation, Woo admitted to controlling an organisation of around 60 student and worker sympathisers, and his involvement in planning grenade attacks on police establishments in June 1956. Worryingly, 153 serviceable hand grenades were recovered following his arrest, even though the violent arm of the MCP had been inactive for some time. If the information Woo gave up in his interrogation can be relied upon, he had been in charge of 'A' District since its inception. Previously he had served in 'O' District under Tit Fung, but around 1952-53 formed his own district after a personal quarrel.[61] If nothing else, this is an interesting reminder that the 'communist terrorists' pursued relentlessly by an expansive British intelligence machine were mainly young men and women who were fuelled as much by personal passions and beliefs as by systematic indoctrination or foreign inspiration. Age was an important factor in policing Singapore, where approximately half the population were classified by the colonial authorities as 'youths'.[62]

During the period of 1951-55, Special Branch struggled to move past the problems which plagued it from 1948-50. The arrest of the Town Committee and

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[58] FCO 141/15952/1, Singapore Police Intelligence Journal, 30 September 1954.
[59] FCO 141/15952/1, Singapore Police Intelligence Journal, 31 December 1954; Singh, *Quest for Political Power*, p. xxiii.
[60] CO 1030/239, Singapore LIC report, 16-31 March 1955.
[61] FCO 141/14768, Singapore Police Intelligence Journal, 28 February 1959.
[62] FCO 141/14766, Colonial Office memorandum, 'Singapore – Political Situation and Outlook', 10 February 1958.

loss of inside sources on the MCP was not counterbalanced by the increasingly out-of-date intelligence provided by its captured and defecting ringleaders. From 1951 until autumn 1952, the local intelligence machine lost the initiative. Their intake of intelligence enabled a number of significant tactical successes, but often this was the result of chance or ordinary policing and not always testament to an excellent security intelligence culture. Only from 1953 did they produce consistently good intelligence about MCP organisation and intentions. Once this information began to be produced, Special Branch was well-placed to act upon it. However, in explaining the decline of MCP underground activity in favour of a united front strategy, Special Branch successes are just one factor. From October 1951, the central Party authorities began enforcing a more cautious, politicised approach. The changing political and constitutional environment in Singapore seemed to hold greater opportunities for such an approach than for the previous violent methods adopted by the MCP.

Special Branch methods and culture

The mixed record of Special Branch in producing security intelligence raises questions relating to their methods and culture. From 1951-53, very little was known about the MCP organisation in Singapore. Information was gained more from translating and examining captured documents than from recruiting agents within the MCP. In contrast, during the period before 1951, Special Branch had access to more secret and long-term sources of information. These documents were captured during raids which in many cases relied upon more quotidian police procedures or sheer good luck. Therefore, the extent to which Special Branch was an effective security intelligence instrument as well as being a mechanism for policing needs to be considered.

Special Branch attested that two of its greatest successes against the communist underground – the arrest of the Town Committee in December 1950 and the discovery of the Jurong Road headquarters in November 1952 – were the result of preventive policing. Following the arrest of one Town Committee member in April 1950, Special Branch lost important active sources. An unexpected lead in December enabled the prompt arrest of the surviving

committee members (although there remains much uncertainty regarding the precise circumstances entailed). Likewise, in November 1952, a regular police spot-check uncovered the vital evidence which led to the MCP communications centre.[63] Although this speaks of an efficient, quick-acting police force, it could also imply that H/SIFE Courtenay Young was justified in regarding the working culture of Special Branch to be less like an intelligence agency and more like a police force.

Even after Special Branch succeeded in piecing together a picture of the MCP underground by the end of 1953, this did not mean that all subsequent successes flowed from intelligence production. The major enforcement operation which netted the arrests of Tit Fung and Sam Kung in June-July 1954 resulted from MCP over-reach and responsive policing. On 25 June 1954, five Workers Protection Corps activists attempted to extort $10,000 from a local businessman. This was not dissimilar to MCP policy in 1950, extorting funds under threat of sabotage or assassination. Immediate police action secured the arrest of two of the extortionists on the spot. Follow-up operations snared the remaining three conspirators as well as sixteen other suspects. Subsequent operations led police to Sam Kung and Tit Fung.[64]

In this instance, Special Branch benefited from a sound system of policing which enabled the first two members of the extortion gang to be immediately detained. From the evidence available, it would seem that follow-up operations relied upon clues found on their persons or information revealed under interrogation. Whilst interrogations are an important source of security intelligence, they are equally part of the ordinary criminal investigation procedure. The extent to which Special Branch, in this operation, acted any different from the CID appears limited. Security intelligence, as understood by its main British practitioners, MI5 and SIFE, involved a specific process or intelligence cycle. Because Special Branch was also part of the police enforcement procedure, an intelligence cycle involving separate stages of collection, analysis and dissemination does not seem appropriate for their activities. It is understandable that organisations such as MI5 frequently implied that colonial or political

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[63] CO 1022/250, Special Branch memorandum, 'The MCP in Singapore', 22 December 1952.
[64] FCO 141/14578, LIC report, 1-15 July 1954.

intelligence were not the same as security intelligence. However, these definitions were also inherently linked to power relations and must be approached with caution. The processed information which Special Branch was producing was unequivocally security intelligence vital to the national security of Singapore. Admittedly it was at the same time political intelligence integral to colonial supremacy. The ways in which this intelligence was produced, however, form the greatest distinction between their operational culture and that of MI5 or SIFE. It is therefore not helpful to draw a rigid distinction between security and political or police intelligence, but rather to interrogate the relationships between different activities within the overall security intelligence sphere.

Although the distinction between policing and intelligence in Special Branch activities is somewhat unclear, other factors explaining their increasing success from 1953 are more transparent. One of the most important factors was the improving cooperation between the Singapore Special Branch and their counterparts in the Federation of Malaya. When Sir John Fearns Nicoll arrived as Governor of Singapore in April 1952, he faced criticism from the Federation for not doing more to prevent the sending of food supplies to insurgents in Johore. Nicoll strengthened the Special Branch presence on the Johore Straits and reorganised police launch patrols. In August 1952 he agreed to loan five Special Branch officers to the Federation at the request of General Templer, even though this considerably weakened the Singapore police.[65]

This was a significant period in the development of an effective intelligence system over the causeway in the Federation. Following the dissolution of MSS in 1948, the Federation Special Branch faced greater difficulties than its Singapore counterpart in becoming operationally effective. This was partly a result of the very different operating conditions they faced. Equally, the development of the Federation Special Branch was hindered by confused lines of authority: they reported to the Commissioner of Police, but were also subject to oversight from the High Commissioner's Director of Intelligence. When Gerald Templer was appointed High Commissioner and Director of Operations in 1952, he enacted reforms to separate Special Branch from ordinary

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[65] CO 1022/250, Nicoll to Paskin 30 September 1952.

CID investigations and to engender greater coordination between Special Branch and service intelligence. As previous historians have argued, the Federation Special Branch only started becoming really effective as a result of Templer's reforms from 1952.[66]

Consequently, Singapore's decision to support Templer by seconding experienced Special Branch officers was a significant show of support. Whilst the Federation Special Branch had been floundering for some time, its Singapore equivalent had enjoyed a great deal of tactical success. Although the available records do not reveal how this assistance was received in Kuala Lumpur, it can be presumed that sharing this experience during an important period of transformation was a welcome gesture of goodwill. Concurrently, Templer's newly appointed Director of Intelligence, Jack Morton, worked from Kuala Lumpur to engender greater cooperation. Morton had served as H/SIFE until 1952, and consequently was keen to promote solutions which crossed territorial boundaries. Morton proposed that the two Special Branches formulate a joint plan for penetration of the MCP. This was deemed impractical due to the two different situations (communist insurgency and communist subversion). However, other initiatives proved more successful. These included the posting of liaison officers between the Singapore Local Intelligence Committee and its Federation equivalent.[67]

With reference to this increasing cooperation between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, the Governor of Singapore praised the cooperation between police headquarters. Nevertheless, he argued that it did not go deep enough. He wrote of a need for officers to know each other personally, to meet frequently, and to know what each side is doing in the field. Nicoll deprecated 'the deeply ingrained habit in Malaya of everyone working in his own watertight compartment', exacerbated by 'antagonism at official as well as unofficial levels between Singapore and the Federation'.[68]

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[66] Sinclair, 'The Sharp End of the Intelligence Machine', pp. 469-471; Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police*, p. 97.
[67] Comber, Malaya's Secret Police, pp. 185-187.
[68] CO 1022/250, Nicoll to Paskin 30 September 1952.

The immediate results of improving cooperation were twofold. Firstly, police cooperation helped to disrupt the MCP underground in Singapore by cutting off their lines of communication with the Federation. Documents seized from the Jurong Road interrogation centre showed that seaborne communications between the Town and Rural Directing Committee and Johore had been cut off for several months.[69] This left the Singapore communist underground reliant on land communications across the Johore-Singapore causeway. These were easier to police due to a system of identity card checks. Such communications routes were coordinated by Tit Fung; the re-arrest of whom in July 1954 effectively severed communications between the MCP remnants in Singapore and Malaya for at least six months.[70]

In addition, improving cooperation between the two Special Branches enabled more timely exchange of intelligence of mutual interest as well as the implementation of joint operations. This included sharing intelligence seized from the courier killed in Johore on 17 October 1952, which enabled the Singapore Special Branch to better understand MCP motives in curbing their violent activities. These had previously been attributed to local necessity whereas they were also a response to centrally-mandated policy.[71] In October 1953, the operation which removed MCP Singapore leader Ah Shu was a joint endeavour between the Singapore and Federation Special Branches. In a previous incident of summer 1952, the Federation Special Branch seconded an officer to Singapore to continue the hunt for an important MCP leader, Lee Meng, who had evaded them in Johor Baru (the Federation-Singapore border town). Cooperation between the two Special Branches resulted in Lee Meng's arrest in Singapore, and helped the Singapore Special Branch progress its investigations against Ah Shu, the Singapore communist leader who was later arrested in 1953.[72] Improving liaison was therefore a significant ingredient in the increasing success of both the Federation and Singapore Special Branches.

Another factor which helps to explain the success of Special Branch in keeping a lid on underground activities is that of the extensive powers available to

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[69] CO 1022/250, Special Branch memorandum, 'The MCP in Singapore', 22 December 1952.
[70] FCO 141/15952/1, Singapore Police Intelligence Journal, 31 January 1955.
[71] CO 1022/250, Special Branch memorandum, 'The MCP in Singapore', 22 December 1952.
[72] Comber, *Malaya's Secret Police*, pp. 228-230.

them. William Cheng, a Deputy Superintendent in Special Branch, recalled that Special Branch had significant power and influence in the colony. They had direct access to the Governor (the highest authority), who would invariable heed their advice and authorise whatever operations were deemed necessary. To some extent, the tremendous powers of search and detention which were granted under Emergency Regulations were a source of fear and deterrence amongst their enemies. However, after 1959, Special Branch had to report to both a locally-elected cabinet and an Anglo-Malayan-Singaporean Internal Security Council, which was less automatically receptive of their views.[73]

Whilst some aspects of Special Branch work closely resembled their police functions, in other ways, they developed an effective and recognisable security intelligence process. Richard Corridon was one of its highest-ranking officers under the directorships of Alan Blades and Khaw Kai Boh. In an oral history testimony, Corridon recalled the methods used by Special Branch to combat the MCP. Their typical *modus operandi* involved long-term surveillance operations supplemented by attempts to recruit agents or informants. Once a suspect was arrested, they would be rigorously interrogated, commonly using psychological methods including sleep deprivation. This would provide further information to be fed into the Special Branch intelligence registry to guide future operations.[74]

The interception of correspondence provided an additional method of intelligence-gathering. Since the start of the Emergency, telephone tapping against political parties was widespread. Special Branch also had detectives within the Post Office to conduct postal scanning and interception. Corridon remembered one Indian detective who was exceptionally gifted at re-sealing letters, but was later found to be using his talents to steal money from envelopes. In Corridon's view, postal and telephone interception was more reliable than agent testimony at providing evidence to justify enforcement action.[75]

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[73] NAS 001458, Interview with William Cheng, reel 8.
[74] NAS 000044, Interview with Richard Corridon, reels 9 and 13.
[75] NAS 000044, Interview with Richard Corridon, reel 13.

Interrogations were a vital part of the intelligence process.[76] However, as Singapore moved towards self-government, these activities came under increasing political scrutiny. As Chief Minister, David Marshall had curtailed the more excessive powers of the police by repealing some of the Emergency Regulations, such as those giving wide powers to impose curfew. However, following an upsurge in what Special Branch depicted as communist-directed subversion in 1955, Marshall was forced to introduce a new Preservation of Public Security Ordinance. This restored many of the powers previously held by Special Branch and the police, with one noteworthy caveat. Previously Special Branch powers of detention were subject only to the oversight of the executive branch of the colonial government. A panel of inquiry consisting of three judges was created to provide judicial review. This panel had the power to overturn detention orders and compel the immediate release of those detained if they felt that releasing them would not prejudice the defence or internal security of Singapore.[77] However, from the incomplete archival evidence relating to the operation of this mechanism, it does not appear that the judicial committee exercised their powers at all frequently.

Following a visit to its headquarters on Robinson Road in 1957, the Chief Justice praised Special Branch for their work, but questioned the conditions of cells they used in the Central Police Station. These seemed very hot and dark, and prisoners were only given 15 minutes exercise a day. The Chief Justice was told that uncooperative detainees could be kept in these conditions for three to six months, and were sometimes awakened for night interrogations. He denounced these as the least agreeable prison cells he had seen in his experience in many colonies, but appreciated that 'the kid glove is not an adequate weapon to employ when fighting the menace of Communism'. Overall, the Chief Justice was satisfied that:

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[76] Thomas Maguire and others have noted how interrogation intelligence was a vital source of information for counterinsurgency in the Federation, as well as providing 'psychological intelligence' to guide attempts to undermine enemy morale or encourage defections: Thomas J. Maguire, 'Interrogation and "Psychological Intelligence": The Construction of Propaganda during the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1958', in *Interrogation in War and Conflict: A Comparative and Interdisciplinary Analysis*, ed. by Christopher Andrew and Simona Tobia (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 132-152 (p. 132).

[77] NAS 000156, Interview with David Saul Marshall, reel 9.

> I do not believe that brutality takes place in these cells and if, as I am told is the case, the knowledge of the Special Branch is materially increased as a result of vigorous interrogation of detainees, whose resistance, no doubt, is lowered by Spartan living conditions, the end achieved is worth the somewhat unpleasant methods employed in getting it.[78]

This ruling is symptomatic of the very limited oversight exerted by the colonial judiciary over the powers of Special Branch, even during the period of the Rendel Constitution. However, as the next chapter shows, once this scrutiny of Special Branch interrogation methods entered the public sphere, the police had to deal with potentially greater ramifications.

Overall, a number of factors contributed to Special Branch successes against the communist underground in Singapore. On the one hand, they benefitted from good fortune and the fruits of a sound system of preventive policing. Conversely, they demonstrated increasing prowess at security intelligence methods such as agent recruitment, interrogation and both human and technical surveillance. Special Branch was both a police and an intelligence agency, and its working culture reflected a hybrid of these two influences. Moreover, the operational environment in which they worked was broadly in their favour. The particular geography of Singapore, consisting of rural outskirts and a densely populated urban centre could be both a hindrance and a help. On the one hand, it was harder to conduct long-term surveillance in the rural areas, to which the communist underground increasingly fled as the city was left to the united front movement. But conversely, this left the communists increasingly isolated. The political environment of the Emergency Regulations gave the police, including Special Branch, extensive powers. Perhaps most importantly, Singapore was an island, and there were only two ways the Singapore MCP could communicate with the Party hierarchy in the Federation: over the causeway or by boat. Improving coordination between the Singapore and Federation helped to sever these communications, leaving the Singapore MCP ever more vulnerable as Special Branch kept picking off its leaders. Special Branch were still primarily reactive, but succeeding in keeping a lid on the level of MCP activity using the same methods they had used in Operation Bulldog in 1948-49.

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[78] FCO 141/14867, Chief Justice to Commissioner of Police, 15 August 1957.

Local ramifications of regional problems

In addition to countering MCP underground activity, security intelligence agencies also had to monitor local manifestations of bigger regional and global problems. Singapore experienced a minor spy scare in October 1951 when the SLO realised that one Ivan Krotov, due to arrive for a meeting of the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, was implicated in the Gouzenko affair in Canada. Krotov had been a Commercial Counsellor in Ottawa, but was revealed by Igor Gouzenko, who defected in September 1945, to be an intelligence officer known as 'the Economist'. MI5 did not feel this was of any special significance, but officials in Singapore disagreed.[79]

The Secretary for Internal Affairs, J. C. Barry, argued that if the press found out Krotov's identity, it could be very embarrassing for Britain. He noted that:

> Whilst it is probably true to say that all Iron Curtain representatives are spies, we could be accused of being unreal in our anti-communist efforts if we admitted a man who has been proved to have been actively engaged in subverting Commonwealth nations in the course of his espionage activities in a Commonwealth country.[80]

This comment is interesting on a number of levels. Firstly, Gouzenko's indictment hardly amounted to proof that Krotov was a spy. Coupled with Barry's assertion that all Soviet bloc representatives were spies, this represents Cold War paranoia rather than foreign policy realism. Overall, it is suggestive of an overblown spy scare fuelled by fantastical perceptions of ubiquitous Soviet espionage and fear of a public scandal. Singapore does not appear to have been a major target for Soviet intelligence operations. The records brought to Britain by the Soviet defector Vasili Mitrokhin in 1992 showed that, in 1973, the KGB budget for its Singapore residency was only 22,600 roubles. In comparison, Japan was budgeted 203,100; India 204,600; and Indonesia 72,800.[81] Of course, these figures represent a period when Britain had withdrawn most of its intelligence and defence interests (the

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[79] FCO 141/14534, Tolson (SLO) to Davies (Governor's Private Secretary), 9 October 1951.
[80] FCO 141/14534, Minute by J. C. Barry, 10 October 1951.
[81] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The KGB and the World: The Mitrokhin Archive II* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 557.

JIC(FE) was wound down in 1971) and Singapore was no longer such an important intelligence centre as in the 1950s.

In 1951, Krotov was allowed to enter Singapore. In fact, he made a most favourable impression upon the local press, which noted the debonair appearance, good humour and generous tipping of the spy-turned-grain-expert.[82]   As *The Straits Times* recounted, the closest thing to a spy scandal during Krotov's three-week sojourn was when one reporter ambushed 'the master spy' in his hotel dining room to ask a leading question about his past in Ottawa. This high-stakes drama culminated in another Soviet representative having a quiet word with the British reporter, complaining that he had spoiled Mr Krotov's breakfast.[83]

More seriously, the Singapore Special Branch treated the CCP as a greater potential threat than the MCP. This was because of the ideological pull factor of China and greater resources available to the PRC if they should decide to embark on state-sponsored subversion or espionage.

Under the leadership of Alan Blades, Special Branch remained in close contact with SIFE headquarters regarding investigations into suspected agents of the Chinese government. These were not necessarily intelligence assets, but usually trade representatives whose motivations required investigation. In the early 1950s, Special Branch also liaised directly with the Secretary for Special Duties at the Indonesian Consulate-General. They shared intelligence about the traffic through Singapore of Chinese representatives journeying to Indonesia. It has already been shown that Indonesia was one of SIFE's closest foreign partners in this period, but it is interesting that Special Branch maintained independent liaison relations with the Consulate-General. After all, similar activity had contributed to earning MSS a reputation for meddling in SIFE affairs.[84]

As the principal window on the PRC, Hong Kong also played an important role in monitoring manifestations of communist Chinese influence in Singapore. Furthermore, given the problems encountered in Hong Kong of Guomindang

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[82] FCO 141/14534, Extract from *The Daily Mail*, 'The Shadow over Mr Ivan Krotov', 25 October 1951.

[83] FCO 141/14534, Extract from *The Straits Times*, 'Red Master Spy was at Singapore Talks', 25 October 1951.

[84] FCO 141/15660, Minute by Blades, 3 April 1951.

intelligence operations, Taiwan was also a target of interest. On 9 April 1951, the Singapore Special Branch acted upon information received from the Hong Kong SLO to detain a man named Kong Jie Siong. Kong was a former Guomindang intelligence officer who – according to the SLO's report – had defected to the PRC and was being sent as their station chief in Singapore. However, upon his arrest and interrogation, Kong admitted nothing beyond his former membership of Guomindang intelligence. The only compromising evidence found upon him was the name of a PRC intelligence agent in Djakarta (the identity of whom was known to Special Branch through their exchange of information with Indonesia). Whilst local Guomindang sources corroborated the Hong Kong reports about Kong's defection, Special Branch believed it more likely that he was simply an ex-Nationalist agent who had incurred their animosity by refusing to continue working for them. They attributed the episode to the Guomindang's expertise at disinformation and desire for revenge against the retired spy.[85]

Locally, the Singapore administration tried to understand and classify different groups within the ethnic Chinese population. This form of administrative information can be truly termed 'political' rather than 'security' intelligence. Unlike Special Branch information, its purpose was not to understand specific security threats but to enable better understanding of the governed population, thereby contributing to the efficiency of colonial rule. Such intelligence procedures rested upon a racialist ideology endemic to the imperial system.

In 1954, 69% of the ethnic Chinese population of Singapore were of British nationality, and 31% were aliens. However, the LIC did not find this classification helpful. They found it more useful to think beyond nationality and divide the Chinese based on a cultural definition. This was a split between those Chinese who identified culturally and politically as Singaporean or Malayan versus those who remained culturally Chinese and showed no signs of integration into the nation. It was the latter who constituted what the British called the 'overseas Chinese', and they greatly outnumbered the 'Malayanised Chinese' who were mainly confined to the professional and educated classes. This was seen to be a matter of Chinese racial pride, which the colonial administration did not

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[85] FCO 141/15660, Special Branch weekly summaries, 14 and 21 April 1951.

regard as entirely equivalent with Western understandings of nationalism or patriotism.[86]

This non-Malayanised 'overseas Chinese' population was further classified into four main groups. The Guomindang group remained loyal to the Taiwanese regime and was most virulently anti-communist. A commercial group remained culturally Chinese to the core but had less political ties with China, and was prepared to be 'Malayan' in an economic sense. An intellectual group was described as the most left-wing and least Chinese-minded, since their leftist ideas originated from the West (a very questionable assertion). Finally, the artisan classes were seen as largely apolitical. According to the LIC, probably the biggest influence on the silent majority of local Chinese was the commercial group. These business leaders identified with the colony of Singapore in an economic sense and were supportive of the British administration for commercial reasons, but did not identify with the Commonwealth as a whole or Malaya more broadly. They were motivated primarily by self-interest.[87] These classifications can be compared with the views espoused by intelligence practitioners from the likes of the JIC and CIA about the psychology of Chinese agents. It would appear that an imperialist world-view was endemic which depicted the Chinese as avaricious, selfish and untrustworthy. The Far Eastern intelligence efforts of the Western powers in the Cold War cannot be divorced from the legacies of imperialism and prevalent attitudes to race.

Whilst such 'political' intelligence sought to better understand the identity of the Singapore Chinese population (albeit through applying sweeping prejudices), 'security' intelligence focused on the influence of the CCP and official PRC institutions. During the 1950s, it did not appear that the CCP had any local structure in Singapore. Nevertheless, as Special Branch noted, 'it is difficult not to exaggerate the potential threat of a political party which has no organisation in Singapore. Objectivity is almost impossible where so much depends on speculation'.[88] Neither MI5 nor local intelligence services had any firm

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[86] FCO 141/14579, LIC paper, 'The position and attitude of the overseas Chinese in Singapore', 12 April 1954.
[87] Ibid.
[88] FCO 141/14578, Supplement no. 2 to Singapore Police Intelligence Journal February 1954, 'Influence of Communist China in Singapore'.

information about the organisation, targets or methods of the communist Chinese intelligence agency. Although a number of so-called CCP 'agents' had been deported from Singapore, there was little evidence to suggest these were any more than trade representatives. The Bank of China had a section collecting economic intelligence about Southeast Asia from its Singapore headquarters, and it was believed probable that this was used as a cover for other intelligence activities.[89]

Consequently, further investigations were initiated against the Bank of China. As aforementioned, MI5 and Foreign Office anti-bugging experts found no evidence that the Bank was being used to tap into the nearby government offices. Overall, there was little evidence that the Bank constituted a present security threat. However, due to its semi-official status, large supply of funds and control over all local trade with China, the Bank was regarded as a serious potential threat due to the disruption it could cause if doing so would serve PRC policy. Secret sources indicated that Bank staff had been subjected to political indoctrination since December 1950. Present sources of information were deemed to be inadequate, making the Bank of China a high priority intelligence target.[90]

All these investigations into PRC officials and institutions appeared to show that communist China was not directly undertaking activities which posed a security threat. However, the pull factor of 'Red China' was regarded as a dangerous ideological influence upon young 'overseas Chinese' in the colony. Special Branch was perennially worried about students departing for further study in China and returning as indoctrinated revolutionaries.

The problem of students returning to China necessitated rapid Special Branch intervention when the daughter of a Johore Councillor absconded to Hong Kong in June 1951 along with a group of five other girls. The head of the Chinese External section, Khaw Kai Boh, was sent to Hong Kong to conduct a thorough investigation.[91] After Khaw returned with the six girls, it was decided to detain and interrogate the four eldest (not the Councillor's daughter). As an aside, the Hong Kong police ran afoul of the Singapore administration by booking

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[89] FCO 141/14560, SLO's review of internal security, January 1953.
[90] FCO 141/15951, Supplement to Singapore Police Intelligence Journal March 1953, 'Bank of China'.
[91] FCO 141/14408, Blades to Blythe, 12 June 1951.

expensive air travel back to Singapore. The parents of the children only offered to pay for their return fares if they were willing to return; since the girls were all unwilling, Singapore Special Branch had to foot the bill.[92]

In their statements, all the girls denied any CCP or MCP sympathies or any knowledge of these organisations. They all claimed that nobody had incited them to go to China, and denied knowledge of any body encouraging students to return. They corroborated each other's statements and all claimed to have been attracted by a better standard of education, making their decision of their own volition. One 19 year old girl, Chen Pui Yeng, stated that 'I am not interested in politics. My sole purpose for going back to China was to continue my studies. I hope you can see my point. What future is there for me in Malaya?'[93]

Evaluating these interrogation reports, Khaw Kai Boh was convinced that the girls were telling the truth. He was inclined to believe their testimonies, which were not broken down by thorough cross-examination, and did not believe the girls to be the 'indoctrinated type'. They seemed to be more childish and misguided. Khaw attributed their reckless decision to the general situation whereby admiration for China as a spiritual homeland was widespread in Singapore, rather than any feelings for the communist regime. This would correspond with the administration's ideas about the majority of the 'overseas Chinese' identifying with China in the cultural sphere. As such, Khaw recommended releasing the girls, and argued for better counter-propaganda to eradicate this prevailing state of mind amongst Chinese students.[94]

China was not the only regional security threat with ramifications for local intelligence operations. Although at the start of the decade Indonesia was an important intelligence partner for SIFE and Special Branch, within a few years it was a growing intelligence threat. In November 1953, the JIC(FE) reviewed Indonesian policy towards Malaya. This was agreed to be driven by anti-colonialist ideology, geographic proximity, racial and religious ties, and economic interests. However, the JIC(FE) concluded there was no evidence of any

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[92] FCO 141/14408, Blades to Morris, 20 June 1951.
[93] FCO 141/14408, Statement of Chen Pui Yeng taken down by Inspector I. H. Ling, 20 June 1951.
[94] FCO 141/14408, Khaw to Blades, June 1951.

coordinated policy in support of a 'Greater Indonesia', and did not expect this to become an issue for the foreseeable future.[95]

Anglo-Indonesian relations deteriorated rapidly. From 1958, Britain and the United States were involved in giving covert aid to a rebel movement in Indonesia's Outer Islands. Against this dangerous background, on 5 February 1959, a Malacca-born Malay named Mustafa bin Derawi was arrested on suspicion of conducting espionage for the Indonesian Consulate-General. Mustafa was found with a miniature camera and tape recorder, wrist-watch microphone and other espionage equipment. He claimed to be acting on instructions from the Indonesian Military Attaché, Captain Soetopo, and spying on E. S. Pohan, the rebel government's 'Ambassador at Large'. Two days before, Mustafa had informed Special Branch that Pohan planned to kidnap the Consul-General with the aid of Chinese secret societies; he then proceeded to tell the same story the other way round to Pohan. He claimed to have recruited sub-agents comprising of two taxi drivers, two reporters and a Malay Police Constable. Special Branch surmised that Mustafa was a pathological liar but there was some basis to believe his claims of being recruited as a spy. He was in possession of an Indonesian passport made out on 30 October, and a diary containing the names of various officials of the Consulate-General. Previously he had been a 'mischievous' journalist.[96] Most likely, Mustafa had indeed been recruited by Indonesian intelligence but proceeded to invent agents and activities in a manner reminiscent of Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana*.

Mustafa's story was given credence by recent reports from the SLO. In late 1958, intelligence reached the British that the Indonesian Consulate-General was increasing its intelligence activities and was attempting to recruit more agents to cover rebel activities in Singapore. Members of Indonesian intelligence were reported to be feeding information to Special Branch to try to discover how far they were interested in Indonesian affairs.[97]

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[95] FCO 141/14560, JIC(FE)(53)24(Final), 'Indonesian policy towards Malaya', 20 November 1953.

[96] FCO 141/15165, Special Branch report to SIC, 12 February 1959.

[97] FCO 141/14646, SLO's intelligence summary, 22 December 1958.

Consequently, in understanding the development of local security intelligence operations in the 1950s, it is necessary to move beyond the inwards-facing dimension. Regional problems such as the threats from China and Indonesia also had internal manifestations within Singapore, and these required a high degree of cooperation between local, regional and national intelligence agencies. In contrast to the situation of 1948-49, this cooperation appears to have functioned well throughout the 1950s. Therefore, as well as providing advice (or interference) designed to improve the 'intelligence culture' of Special Branch, MI5 and SIFE played a valuable role in assisting in the process of intelligence collection, analysis and direction by helping to identify targets of interest and collating pertinent information from across their networks. Just as the expanding Cold War in the 1950s had major implications for the activities of the regional-national intelligence community, it also diluted the inwards-oriented, MCP-focused priorities of the local intelligence community. Due to increasing cooperation and even organisational penetration (when Young planted SIFE officers directly into Special Branch), as well as an increasing level of shared targets and priorities, the local and regional-national intelligence communities became more unified during this period. Perhaps the most marked difference between them remained their differing intelligence cultures, and the implications this had (or perhaps more accurately, the implications which MI5 and SIFE wanted it to have) for their status.

Summary

During the 1950s, British security intelligence faced a number of problems in Singapore. By far the largest was the threat of subversion and violence by the MCP underground organisation. Counteracting this threat was primarily the responsibility of Special Branch. In carrying out its duties, Special Branch enjoyed a mixed record of success. From 1951-53, only sporadic intelligence was gathered about the MCP underground, making targeted and sustained operations very difficult. However, from October 1953, a more complete picture of the communist network was established. This enabled Special Branch to more effectively target communist leaders and ensure the permanent dislocation of the

MCP underground by 1955. As a result, the Party never recovered, and henceforward the threat from united front movements became a greater concern for Special Branch. This new challenge, and the problems it caused for the peaceful decolonisation of Singapore, is examined in the next chapter.

Special Branch evolved a particular operational culture during this period. Their methods were primarily those of surveillance, interrogation and – less frequently – the recruitment of agents or informers. These enabled Special Branch to establish a registry of suspected communist sympathisers to guide future operations. Earlier in the decade, they were dependent on luck or ordinary policing for vital leads that unearthed communist cells or communications centres. However, once its intelligence archive was better established, Special Branch came increasingly to resemble a mature security intelligence organisation, adept at both the intelligence production cycle and in implementing intelligence-led policing. Nevertheless, the core collection problem which had plagued Special Branch in the late 1940s remained equally pertinent. They continued to be on the defensive, able to deliver useful tactical intelligence to enable operations which kept a lid on more violent communist activities, but struggled to achieve sustained strategic intelligence which would have enabled more decisive action against the MCP.

The regional and national levels of intelligence also played a significant role in the security intelligence machine in Singapore. SIFE and MI5 tried to improve the intelligence culture in Special Branch, and also provided access to alternative sources of intelligence which could aid in understanding key targets such as communist China, international communism, or, as will be seen in the next chapter, Lee Kuan Yew. This was particularly pertinent in light of the local repercussions of regional problems. These problems showed the value of the three-tier system of intelligence organisation, and this period saw increasing unity across a broader British intelligence community due to a shared awareness of the interaction between internal and external security threats. In contrast, the purely local nature of the MCP underground meant SIFE and MI5 could be of less assistance in producing or evaluating intelligence, leaving Special Branch struggling on alone into the mid-1950s.

Part 3

Roads to decolonisation, 1955-1959

7. British influence, intelligence and Singapore politics

By the mid-1950s, British security intelligence in Singapore was increasingly forced to deal with the prospect of decolonisation. This affected all three levels. Members of the regional-national intelligence community prepared for the withdrawal of British colonial regimes and made new arrangements to ensure that they continued to receive indigenously-produced intelligence. Given the intention to retain the Singapore base, ensuring post-colonial access to intelligence produced in Singapore was an important contributor to the goal of retaining British influence. Locally, the method adopted for achieving this was through the retention of SLOs. Meanwhile, at the regional level, the future of the vast intelligence bureaucracy at Phoenix Park was increasingly uncertain. Although the office of the Commissioner General had survived economising pressures in the mid-1950s, progress towards self-government also generated uncertainty. There was no guarantee that an independent successor government would continue to tolerate a 'slough of despond' of British spies.

This chapter explores the relationship between security intelligence and decolonisation in Singapore. It considers how decolonisation came to dominate policy and affected the ways in which intelligence responded to both the internal and external Cold Wars. Local political concerns became important to all three levels of intelligence, as regional and national agendas were curtailed and the nature of Special Branch work changed. Nevertheless, security remained the utmost imperative upon which Britain was reluctant to compromise. The key goals for the regional-national intelligence community were to ensure an orderly transfer of power and to leave a legacy of a British intelligence culture. Both of these policies would help ensure the retention of British influence in Singapore and across Southeast Asia more broadly. All three levels of intelligence were united in working to ensure policy-makers felt safe about decolonisation. Intelligence ensured that the British knew that Lee Kuan Yew was not a communist, but still worried that he may prove unable to maintain control of leftist elements.

The Rendel Constitution of 1955 was only the first step towards Singapore's independence. The second significant moment came with the fall of

David Marshall and his replacement as Chief Minister by Lim Yew Hock in June 1956. During negotiations in London in April 1956, Marshall found Britain unwilling to give up their veto on defence and security. Having staked his reputation on achieving results, Marshall had little option but to resign. The new Chief Minister, Lim Yew Hock, proved more amenable to Britain's security agenda. In September-October 1956, Lim dissolved several major communist front organisations in the student and labour fields. This provoked a clash which the government easily won. Under Lim's direction, Special Branch arrested the key leaders of what was perceived as a communist united front in Operation Liberation.

Meanwhile, a new political force gained momentum in Singapore. This was the People's Action Party (PAP) founded in 1954 under the leadership of the young Singaporean Chinese lawyer Lee Kuan Yew. Lee watched on the sidelines as Marshall – who terminated some of the most stringent Emergency Regulations – failed to control the security situation, and Lim Yew Hock sacrificed public support by taking credit for colonial security operations. Lim was too close to the British to be acceptable to the Singapore electorate. Nevertheless, he succeeded where Marshall had failed and reached agreement with London in March 1957 that paved the way for the August 1958 State of Singapore Act. In May 1959, when this thesis ends, Singapore achieved self-government and Lee Kuan Yew's PAP triumphed in the general election. Lee himself wrote that 'Marshall had taught me how not to be soft and weak when dealing with the communists. Lim Yew Hock taught me how not to be tough and flat-footed'.[1] From 1954-59, Lee succeeded in manipulating pro-communist and leftist support without becoming a fellow traveller. In the words of Richard Clutterbuck, Lee Kuan Yew was 'one of the few democratic leaders who has risen to power astride the communist tiger without ever losing control of it'.[2] Lee deftly used Special Branch to purge the PAP of leftist influences which opposed his moderate faction. In February 1963 – a few months before Singapore joined the new Federation of Malaysia – Lee approved Operation Cold Store which saw the detention of over 100 left-wing figures. This effectively removed the opposition in the form of Barisan Sosialis (a

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[1] Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story*, p. 251.
[2] Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution*, p. 104.

new party founded by PAP rebels in 1961) and paved the way for unbroken PAP rule in Singapore.[3] Security intelligence is therefore an important aspect of Singapore's history which demonstrates continuity between the colonial and post-colonial periods. In this regard, the British intelligence apparatus was broadly successful. They helped to establish a stable, non-communist state which continued to operate intelligence services modelled upon a British intelligence culture. British intelligence and police officers remained very influential in the early years of Lee Kuan Yew's government.[4]

The future of British intelligence in Singapore

From the mid-1950s, decolonisation was a major impetus in British policy towards Singapore As well as dominating local politics, it affected how the regional-national intelligence community operated. Political changes acted as a restraining influence on some practices, but also provided new impetus to expand intelligence activities designed to maintain British influence. Following the loss of India in 1947, Singapore became Britain's centre of strategic gravity in Asia. Hong Kong was not regarded as sufficiently defendable in the event of war, and Malaya and Borneo were underdeveloped as military strongholds. As decolonisation seemed increasingly inevitable, Britain's key goal was to appease nationalist demands without compromising the security and continued ownership of its bases.[5]

In spring 1955, the future of the Commissioner General came under review. Malcolm MacDonald's tenure had already been extended six times, allowing him to establish a unique position and reputation. However, the Colonial Office felt the time was right for a change. MacDonald was described as flagging in his energies, 'not surprising after eight years in so enervating a climate' and too 'Asian-minded' to be the best interpreter of British policies. In addition, the Colonial Office questioned the need for a Commissioner General and the

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[3] Jones, 'Creating Malaysia', p. 103.

[4] Dennis Bloodworth, *The Tiger and the Trojan Horse* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1986), p. 203.

[5] Lau, 'Decolonisation and the Cold War in Singapore', p. 44.

continuance of the office could not be taken for granted.[6] Preoccupied with internal constitutional changes, the Colonial Office felt that MacDonald was too sanguine about the prospects for closer unity between Singapore, Malaya and Borneo. The metropole saw this as a 'long, difficult and quite likely fruitless task'.[7] In the Federation, Gerald Templer thought MacDonald's plans for a Greater Malaysia were 'plain nonsense'.[8] Ultimately, MacDonald's faith in merger was justified. The eventual creation of Malaysia in September 1963 was a security construct intended to neutralise Singapore's Chinese population by placing them within a federal, majority-Malay and trusted anti-communist state.[9]

On 6 August 1955, the Prime Minister issued a formal directive to the new Commissioner General for Southeast Asia, Sir Robert Heatlie Scott. From the beginning of Scott's appointment, the future position of regional intelligence was intimately connected with that of the broader Commissioner General's bureaucracy. Regional intelligence appeared increasingly to resemble an outdated 'slough of despond' as British territories moved towards independence. Nevertheless, as examined in chapter five, by adapting to the changing environment, the likes of SIFE and the JIC(FE) survived threatened metropolitan cuts and played an active role in the implementation of Cold War policy. The atmosphere of political uncertainty brought about some changes to their functions. SIFE was increasingly influential as an instrument of intelligence diplomacy and a link with SEATO, rather than purely being a body for intelligence assessments. Although the extent to which Singapore represented a 'unique window' for intelligence production was questioned by the metropole, it instead came to represent unique opportunities for exerting influence.

Whilst the practical ability of Britain to maintain a regional intelligence centre was under doubt, its desirability was not. In Cabinet discussions on Britain's counter-subversion policy, Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan advocated for greater involvement by SIS and MI5 in territories experiencing constitutional transition. He worried that the speed of decolonisation was increasingly swift, and that it would not always be possible to build up adequate

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[6] CO 1030/193, Colonial Office brief for the Secretary of State, c. March 1955.
[7] CO 1030/193, Minute by Mackintosh (Colonial Office), 3 September 1954.
[8] CO 1030/193, Minute by Lloyd (Colonial Office), 24 June 1954.
[9] Jones, 'Creating Malaysia', pp. 86-87.

indigenous intelligence services ready for independence. Britain must therefore find unilateral ways of maintaining essential intelligence and security interests. Moreover, as elected officials (such as Singapore's Chief Minister) gained more influence over local security matters, local intelligence mechanisms could not be fully relied upon by the imperial government. Macmillan argued that Britain needed to retain officers who would act solely in the interests of Britain.[10] This view from the Foreign Secretary (who would shortly become Prime Minister) corroborated MI5's plans to retain SLOs to guarantee future access to intelligence and represent British interests.

However, the future constitutional position of Singapore created questions over the tenability of certain intelligence activities. When the JIC(London) and JIC(FE) chairmen met with Governor Black in February 1956, Black voiced concern about the increasing attention being given to clandestine measures. He was concerned that, now Singapore had a partially-elected cabinet, constitutional progress could be derailed or embarrassed by intelligence and propaganda operations.[11]

This was demonstrated by the decision to terminate an SIS operation in 1956. Operation Debenture was described by one senior defence official as the first British operation of any magnitude for the penetration of communist China. It was a collaboration between SIS, RIO and the services. Through radio broadcasts from British defence establishments in Singapore, its goal was to stimulate dissent and possibly defections. From the intelligence angle alone, this was justified as a worthwhile attempt to increase their negligible lines into China. It was also a covert action operation designed to weaken Chinese morale in the Cold War. The broadcasting station was located on service land in order to reduce the risk of local political complications in the context of the Rendel Constitution. British officials feared an outcry if it was discovered they were conducting operations against China from Singapore.[12]

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[10] PREM 11/1582, Minute by Macmillan, 19 October 1955.

[11] CO 968/123, Record of a meeting held at Government House, 2 February 1956.

[12] [TNA] AIR 40/2552, Minute by Redman (Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff), 22 June 1954.

Operation Debenture became active in May 1955. However, after just six months, the operation came under scrutiny due to the lack of any observable results. SIS proposed terminating the operation. This was supported by the Commissioner General for reasons pertinent to decolonisation.

The operation was first conceived in March 1954. SIS envisaged broadcasting original news and commentary prepared in Singapore under cover of a local Chinese radio enthusiast anxious to spread the 'truth' about the outside world to his countrymen. However, because of the estimated cost, it was agreed instead that they would re-transmit the previous day's BBC broadcasts in Mandarin.[13]

In October 1955, SIS informed the Foreign Office of their intention to abort the operation. The Foreign Office demurred at first, but on the Commissioner General's advice, dropped their objection to termination. Scott believed that the continuation of the operation could soon become embarrassing if they were forced to disclose it to an elected Singaporean Chinese official.[14] However, the Chiefs of Staff disagreed. They felt it would be a retrograde step to abandon their only operation against the Chinese mainland.[15]

In response to these discussions, Sir John Sinclair, the Chief of SIS, suggested that Debenture could relocate outside of Singapore provided funds could be generated for more aggressive broadcasting given the lack of results on the present scale. However, during his visit to Singapore in February 1956, the JIC(London) chairman was convinced by Scott that there was insufficient evidence of the impact of the operation to justify continuing it, even in a less politically sensitive area.[16] Debenture was therefore terminated. The Commissioner General's reluctance to conduct covert action from Singapore was a major factor in this decision. Decolonisation therefore acted as a restraining influence on certain intelligence activities, as Britain could no longer count on

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[13] CO 1035/82, Memorandum by the Overseas Planning Section, 'Operation Debenture', 16 December 1955.

[14] Ibid.

[15] CO 1035/82, Extract from minutes of the Official Committee on Communism (Overseas), 30 November 1955.

[16] CO 1035/82, Extract from minutes of the Official Committee on Communism (Overseas), 30 December 1955.

being able to conduct clandestine work from Singapore without considering the implications.

Progress towards decolonisation had an equally significant impact upon the local intelligence machine. As well as requiring good security intelligence to guide this process and prevent interference from subversive elements, intelligence and security became an object of political debate during constitutional negotiations.

In 1956, talks between the Chief Minister and British government about the future of Singapore required agreement on future responsibilities for internal security. The Colonial Office was increasingly certain that Britain could not sacrifice control over internal security, as this was a necessary corollary to safeguarding British military, naval and air force bases. Furthermore, Britain would not countenance transferring responsibility when Singapore was in no position to guarantee law and order without assistance from metropolitan troops.[17] Perhaps this observation was a reaction to the Maria Hertogh riots of December 1950, in which the police relied upon military support to restore order.

During talks in summer 1956, Lim Yew Hock proposed a Defence and Security Council which would consist of three Singaporean, two British and one Federation members, with the British High Commissioner in the chair and having a casting, but no original, vote.[18] Following the failure of talks with Marshall, the British side was willing to drop their power of intervention in internal security affairs as long as satisfactory machinery was created which would continue to meet British intelligence requirements of full access to local intelligence product. They also insisted that efficiency must take precedence over 'Malayanisation' in the Special Branch, as it had done in the Federation, and that the position of SLO must be maintained. It was hoped that Lim would be more amenable than Marshall because he seemed to share Britain's anti-communist agenda.[19] Britain prioritised access to intelligence over control of intelligence, implying that collection remained the biggest problem and was of greater concern than direction.

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[17] CO 1035/8, Lennox-Boyd to Black, 20 March 1956.
[18] CO 1035/8,. Johnston to Black, 3 August 1956.
[19] CO 1035/8, ISD brief for Secretary of State, 5 December 1956.

Lim Yew Hock met with MI5 Director-General Roger Hollis on 21 December 1956. Lim was keen to send high-grade Singaporean police officers to London for MI5 training.[20] Following this talk and others with the Colonial Office, Lim made it clear that Britain would continue to have the fullest access to security intelligence from Singapore sources.[21]

With such assurances, Britain felt able to reach agreement with Lim over the control of security. They agreed that, under the new constitution which would take effect in 1959, an Internal Security Council would be formed. With three British, three Singaporean and one Federation member, a British-Malayan coalition would always be able to outvote the Singaporean government. This would ensure an anti-communist agenda would prevail even if more leftist forces swept to power in Singapore. Such a composition satisfied Britain's security imperative of decolonising without jeopardising Cold War interests. The agreement can also be seen as Britain's acceptance of the need to compromise and negotiate in the direction of security efforts so long as the intelligence product remained flowing. Lim agreed that all security intelligence produced by the Special Branch would remain directly available to the British government, and that the new Singapore government would not interfere in the police. This reflects the strong British belief in the independence of the police from politics. External defence continued to be the remit of the British during the period of 1959-63, in which Singapore attained self-government but remained a formal colony.[22] Further, more informal safeguards for British interests were provided through the retention of expatriate officers in senior positions. Former Special Branch chief Alan Blades remained Commissioner of Police from 1957 until 1963. Following a brief and largely disastrous attempt to make a senior local Special Branch officer its chief from 1957-59, another expatriate, Eric John Linsell, served as Director of Special Branch from 1959-61. Linsell had no prior intelligence experience and was more of a uniform and CID man, so Lee Kuan Yew came to rely increasingly

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[20] CO 1035/8, Note by Roger Hollis on meeting with Lim Yew Hock, 21 December 1956.
[21] CO 1035/8, Minute by Johnston, 28 December 1956.
[22] Ball, 'Selkirk in Singapore', pp. 166-167.

on senior officers like Richard Corridon and Ahmad Khan for providing analysis of the communist threat.[23]

Decolonising intelligence and retaining influence

As well as high-level negotiations, providing practical aid was another means of ensuring continued influence over intelligence production. This enabled metropolitan intelligence actors and their regional offshoots to build the foundations of continued influence in Southeast Asia.

From 1950, MI5 Head Office ran training courses for British colonial Special Branches. These were overhauled in 1955 following the Templer Report on colonial security, and MI5 began offering three or four courses per year. Far Eastern colonies provided much of the student intake. Moreover, in 1954, SIFE officer Alec MacDonald was appointed as MI5's new Security Intelligence Advisor to the Colonial Office. His work entailed advising the colonial bureaucracy in London and conducting on-site visits to individual territories. The Templer Report led to the appointment of two deputies to enable greater coverage of on-the-spot advice.[24]

Alec MacDonald envisaged his role as being about more than just providing short-term colonial security. Conforming to MI5's broader goal of ensuring lasting intelligence liaison, he saw the position of Security Intelligence Adviser as a way of building professional indigenous intelligence services able to contribute to Commonwealth intelligence sharing. This would be a valuable bequest to newly independent states, albeit a selfish one. MI5 saw intelligence decolonisation as the best long-term guarantee of maintaining British intelligence interests in Southeast Asia.[25] As in other decolonising regions, security intelligence actors played a 'missionary' role in helping to spread a Commonwealth intelligence culture which would preserve their influence and promote continued liaison. In the 'old' Commonwealth nations (such as

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[23] Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story*, p. 329.

[24] CAB 21/2925, Report on colonial security by General Sir Gerald Templer, 23 April 1955: chapter 1, 'Intelligence'.

[25] [TNA] CAB 158/30, Annex to JIC(57)115, Review by the Security Intelligence Adviser of the Development of Intelligence Organisation in the Colonial Territories, c. November 1957.

Australia), MI5 helped build analogous organisations to itself. In new states nearing independence, the focus was on developing the capacity of police Special Branches and encouraging new political leaders to see intelligence as serving the cause of national security, not political interests.[26] In carrying out this task, intelligence agencies supported overall government policy expressed through the Commonwealth Security Conferences began by Prime Minister Clement Attlee in 1948.[27] Perhaps ironically given earlier MI5 views about Special Branches as lesser intelligence organisations, they now seemed to acknowledge that these agencies were the best avenues for national security intelligence in the colonies. It was feared that organisations independent from the police (like MI5 itself) would more easily fall prey to political interests.

After the Templer Report in spring 1955, MI5 involvement in training colonial Special Branches expanded massively (see table 7.1). Topics covered in the 1955 syllabus related to intelligence organisation (e.g. the position of Special Branches in the overall security intelligence picture and MI5 imperial responsibilities) or methods (the conduct of surveillance operations and interrogation practices). Instructors included Bill Magan (head of MI5's overseas E Branch) former H/SIFE Hugh Winterborn, Security Intelligence Advisor Alec MacDonald and Soviet expert Millicent Bagot.[28]

Table 7.1. Colonial Police Officers attending MI5 Training Courses, 1954-1957.[29]

MI5 Training Courses	1954	1955	1956	1957
In-Situ Courses	35	296	180	126
London Courses	15	15	135	118
Total	50	311	315	244

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[26] Murphy, 'Creating a Commonwealth Intelligence Culture', p. 140. This policy failed in non-colonial Middle Eastern territories where the key problem was that police intelligence agencies were rarely apolitical. See: Hashimoto, 'The Training of Secret Police', p. 457.

[27] Lomas, *Intelligence, Security and the Attlee Governments*, p. 237.

[28] CO 1035/54, Circular from A.1E (MI5), 21 October 1955.

[29] CAB 158/30, Annex to JIC(57)115, Review by the Security Intelligence Adviser of the Development of Intelligence Organisation in the Colonial Territories, c. November 1957.

SIFE supported these central MI5 initiatives at the regional level. In July 1951, they hosted a conference of British Special Branches to give guidance on directing intelligence requirements. Around this time, SIFE also began giving specialised training to the Hong Kong Special Branch to try to improve the production of raw intelligence on the PRC as a counterbalance to SIS deficiencies.[30] A similar conference was held in September 1952, which SIFE used to reprimand certain Special Branches over perceived intelligence 'black spots'. As in 1948, the blame for collection problems was placed at the local level. Courtenay Young admonished the Singapore Special Branch for a 'defeatist' attitude to long-term agent penetration, and its Hong Kong counterpart for not doing enough to encourage Chinese defectors.[31]

In the early 1950s, SIFE's main goal in providing assistance to Special Branches was to improve intelligence collection. MI5 Director-General Sir Dick White argued that SIFE should put its best people inside Special Branches to improve the flow of intelligence, because otherwise SIFE collation was a waste of time.[32] Without an intake of raw information, the regional intelligence bureaucracy could very well appear 'a slough of despond'. Even in territories where SIFE was directly represented through SLOs, intelligence collection and collation were not automatically improved. Whilst serving as H/SIFE, Young worried that the Special Branches were not allowing SLOs unrestricted access to files due to suspicions of MI5 interference upon their prerogative. This was little better than the situation in 1948 when MSS was reportedly denying the DSO access to intelligence needed for interpreting the Malayan Emergency. In response, Young closed down the SLO appointments in Malaya and Singapore, instead seconding officers inside the two Special Branches. This entailed a perceptive change from the SLO as an aide to the Governor to the SLO as a corollary of the intelligence producers.[33]

However, during the partnership of Robert Scott as Commissioner General and Dick Thistlethwaite as H/SIFE from 1956 to 1959, these relationships were

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[30] KV 4/424, SIFE internal review, 2 April 1952.
[31] KV 4/425, Young to Shaw, 22 September 1952.
[32] KV 4/474, Liddell diary, 6 March 1952.
[33] KV 4/425, Memorandum by Young, 'The Basic Problems of SIFE Area Posts', 25 September 1955.

fundamentally reoriented. The focus shifted to providing post-colonial intelligence liaison instead of improving intelligence production in the present. Following the repeal of some of the Emergency Regulations in Singapore, Thistlethwaite commented that:

> It is clear to everybody, I should think, from the Secretary-of-State who has just been out here, to the meanest shop-keeper that a new era has begun in Singapore and the Federation. There are the beginnings of self-government in both and there will be a snowball demand for complete autonomy which it may be possible to guide, but not to resist.[34]

SIFE could help guide this transfer of power by improving local Special Branches ready for 'Malayanisation'. This corresponded with Christopher Andrew's depiction of the SLO as a means of maintaining British influence to keep former colonies out of the Soviet orbit.[35] This was distinct from the earlier function of SLOs in providing colonial governments with access to MI5's global intelligence pool, demonstrating how intelligence priorities were forced to adapt to the changing environment.

Despite reservations about the future of British intelligence activities, SIFE, SIS(FE) and the JIC(FE) all remained in Singapore after 1959. SIFE played a reduced role in guiding regional collation activities, and was withdrawn in 1963. The final H/SIFE, Christopher Herbert, shed responsibility for foreign collation to focus solely on the current and former British territories in the region.[36] During the Brunei Revolt of December 1962-May 1963, SIFE provided practical support by organising interrogation teams from independent Malaya to debrief captured insurgents, then processed the resulting material at SIFE headquarters. Moreover, H/SIFE helped supervise improvements to local intelligence processes in the emerging confrontation with Indonesia.[37]

In addition, Herbert cooperated with the Malayan Commissioner of Police, Claude Fenner, to divide security responsibilities between the federal and territorial governments of the new Malaysia. The central government would be responsible for internal security and the police, with the creation of an Inspector

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[34] KV 4/427, Thistlethwaite to White, 26 August 1955.
[35] Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 442.
[36] FCO 141/12907, Circular from Lyttelton, 6 July 1962.
[37] CO 1035/206, Roger Hollis to Burke Trend (Cabinet Office), 29 January 1963.

General of Police to whom all the territorial Special Branches would be responsible. This plan was a reaction to concerns regarding the security of Singapore, by ensuring that the chain of command avoided Singapore politicians in favour of centralising authority in Kuala Lumpur. In Singapore specifically, a British military intelligence officer would continue to work inside Special Branch. MI5 would continue to station separate SLOs in Malaya, Singapore and Borneo following the dissolution of SIFE.[38] Due to the role of intelligence diplomacy, this would appear to be a successful transition for MI5 which safeguarded access to locally-produced intelligence even after disbanding SIFE.

Consequently, the process of decolonisation in Singapore appears to have been at least a short-term success for British intelligence in achieving national objectives. The goal expressed by Harold Macmillan of ensuring continued access to intelligence, and maintaining British influence over intelligence, security and defence matters, was achieved through the willingness of national and regional intelligence agencies to engage with local partners. In so doing, the regional-national intelligence community expressed a clear bias in favour of the Malayan government of Tunku Abdul Rahman, which had already proven its anti-communist credentials. The future political course of Singapore was less certain. Lee Kuan Yew was seen more as a potential ally than a threat, but Britain could not be sure that he would retain a grip on power until the massive arrest of communist supporters during Operation Cold Store in 1963. To this end, British objectives were best met by exporting a shared intelligence culture through the Special Branch, leaving behind experienced expatriate officers, and negotiating continued access to locally-produced intelligence.

'Malayanisation' problems

The process of decolonisation had equally far-reaching effects for the character of the local intelligence machine. However, these were not always so successful for Britain. The Singapore police was increasingly subjected to 'Malayanisation'. As well as incurring staffing changes and attempts to promote

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[38] CO 1035/205, Memorandum by Herbert and , 'Intelligence Organisation in Malaysia', 29 April 1963.

locally-recruited officers, this also involved growing political and popular scrutiny of Special Branch methods.

Public concerns over the nature of Special Branch policing followed from allegations levied by lawyer T. T. Rajah on behalf of four communist detainees in 1957. These accused Special Branch of inflicting bodily torture including electroshock, beatings, and dousing prisoners with freezing water. However, these very serious allegations did not appear to match the (admittedly limited and potentially unreliable) evidence. The doctor engaged by Mr Rajah found no persuasive evidence to suggest that torture had occurred, and the examination of the prisoners by Dr Chee, the Special Branch Medical Officer who conducted daily visits and thorough weekly examinations of all detainees, directly contradicted the accusations. The government strongly suspected these allegations were fabricated by the prisoners in collusion, as three of them had shared a cell before making these claims.[39] Nevertheless, such serious accusations had to be investigated thoroughly. An internal investigation further discredited the claims by finding clear discrepancies between the accusations levied by Mr Rajah and the statements supplied from the detainees he represented.[40]

Nevertheless, on 24 April 1958, a motion was moved by an independent Member of the Legislative Assembly to condemn Special Branch and demand further investigation. This was defeated by 19 votes to four. Lee Kuan Yew revealed that he had previously been a solicitor for one of the detainees and had advised against making charges against Special Branch; he had terminated his relationship with the prisoner as he refused to be a party to something he fully believed to be untrue. Showing support for Special Branch, Lee denounced the Assembly motion as 'unwise' and 'dishonest'.[41] The Governor despaired that they could not sue Rajah and his clients for libel because it would be impossible to prove their dishonesty in open court. Nevertheless, he noted that:

> All the people who made these allegations are among those who are prepared to go to any lengths including the use of violence to embarrass and overthrow the elected Government of Singapore. It is therefore not

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[39] CO 1030/578, Black to Lennox-Boyd, 28 November 1957.
[40] CO 1030/578, Minute from Cowan to Khaw Kai Boh, 11 December 1957.
[41] CO 1030/578, Extract from *The Singapore Tiger Standard*, 25 April 1958.

> surprising that they will endeavour to use any means to try to discredit the Police Force in the discharge of its lawful functions.[42]

Clearly the British government was sensitive to its appearance and anything that could stand in the way of an orderly and controlled 'Malayanisation'. Moreover, the spectre of communist violence remained a useful rhetorical device in justifying the continuance of a strict security regime.

In evaluating this incident, it is worth noting that we are reliant upon records created by the accused party: Special Branch. It is perhaps unsurprising that the records retained in the 'Migrated Archives' exonerate Special Branch from these allegations of torture. However, two points could be argued to stand in favour of this interpretation. Firstly, Lee Kuan Yew (who, although privately enjoying good contacts with the police, was publicly committed to denouncing colonialism) supported Special Branch against these accusations. It is possible that Lee did so out of self-interest, as by this time he was more concerned with suppressing communist or 'leftist' influences within his own party than with opposing the police. Perhaps more convincingly, this incident could be compared with incidents of torture in colonial territories such as Cyprus or Kenya, where evidence from the Migrated Archives has proven that this brutality took place.[43] If similar instances occurred in Singapore, it would seem unusual that the records relating to them were destroyed entirely whilst damning records from other colonies were retained in secret. However, based on the limited evidence relating to this case – and the subject of torture more broadly – it is impossible to discern the truth with any certainty. At most, it could be said that it is unlikely in this incident that physical torture took place, but that this does not mean that Special Branch never engaged in physical abuses of their power. Psychological interrogation methods with physical manifestations such as sleep deprivation were utilised.[44] Based on the information contained within colonial archives, it is impossible to deduce anything further.

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[42] CO 1030/578, Goode to Lennox-Boyd, 5 May 1958.

[43] David Anderson, 'British Abuse and Torture in Kenya's Counter-Insurgency, 1952-60', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 23(4) (2012), 700-719; Badger, 'Historians, A Legacy of Suspicion and the Migrated Archives', p. 803.

[44] NAS 000044, Interview with Richard Corridon, reel 13.

Although the growth of political oversight of the police could be abused by subversive forces, there were also benefits to 'Malayanisation'. Nigel Morris (Commissioner of Police from 1952-57) recalled that when he first joined the Singapore police in the 1930s, it felt like a force, akin to the army. When he departed as Commissioner in October 1957, he believed it had become more of a public service.[45] In the mid-1930s, they didn't have any locals at the rank of Assistant Superintendent or above. Although a few officers started coming in from elsewhere in Asia, the city colony was predominantly policed by the British. By 1957, around 80% of officers were locally recruited (even though there remained an imbalance between Malay and Chinese recruitment).[46]

However, the move towards self-government prompted some expatriate Special Branch officers to view their future with trepidation. They believed that, due to their actions in policing certain political parties, their careers would suffer after the 1959 elections. As early as April 1956, MI5's Alec MacDonald predicted an exodus of expatriate officers once control of the police lay in the hands of elected ministers. He warned that MI5 could not fill the resulting intelligence gap.[47] The British authorities therefore needed to balance 'Malayanisation' with safeguards to ensure continuity.

One of these officers was Ahmad Khan, who was in charge of the Indian Section from October 1950 and had served in Special Branch for 18 of his 20 years in the Singapore Police. Khan, born in India and by this time a Pakistani national and not a British citizen, applied to retire as an 'entitled officer' with compensation.[48] Khan – an extremely capable officer – had antagonised local politicians on a number of occasions. Khan's apprehension was no doubt heightened by his experience during the Japanese occupation, when his pre-war surveillance of Japanese espionage meant he was treated strictly. Since the war, Khan had been chiefly responsible for the destruction of the MCP Indian section in 1948-50 and was well known to left-wing PAP leaders such as Devan Nair and James Puthucheary. He was in charge of the case against the leftist student newspaper *Fajar* in 1954, when he was accused of being a 'Quisling' by the

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[45] NAS 001745, Interview with Nigel Morris, reel 8.
[46] NAS 001745, Interview with Nigel Morris, reel 9.
[47] CO 1035/8, Memorandum by Alec MacDonald, 20 April 1956.
[48] FCO 141/14950, Khan to Lennox-Boyd, 17 December 1956.

British communist lawyer D. N. Pritt. As a result, Khan's superiors, viewing his case sympathetically, noted that 'Ahmad Khan's name is an anathema to left-wing political leaders'.[49] Khan's application was approved, but in the end he chose to continue serving until 1963 and earned the trust and respect of Lee Kuan Yew.[50]

The new Special Branch Director, Khaw Kai Boh, also applied to retire with compensation. Locally-recruited, Khaw had served continuously in Special Branch and its predecessors since 1945 except for when he attended Scotland Yard and MI5 training in 1953-54, and when he undertook a Law Fellowship in Britain from 1955-57. Upon his return to Singapore, Khaw was made Acting Director of Special Branch in August 1957 and approved in November. He was a British subject and the son of a Singapore-born Chinese family. From October 1945-April 1946, Khaw served as an intelligence officer with Field Security, and investigated war collaborators, many of whom had since become prominent citizens. From 1946-47 he was loaned from MSS to the Penang CID where he conducted underground work against the Ang Bin Huey Triad. From August 1950 until June 1953 he commanded the Special Branch Chinese External section. He had received what he regarded as considerable undesirable publicity in more recent actions against communist front organisations with links to left-wing PAP members.[51]

Khaw's application was more divisive than that of Khan because he had only recently assumed the directorship and had his law fellowship funded by the government. However, on a pragmatic basis, Alan Blades (now Commissioner of Police) worried that rejecting Khaw's application may lead him to press for a transfer or resign before the 1959 elections. If this happened, Special Branch would be in disarray and they would lose a valuable officer currently in line to be the first non-European Commissioner of Police. It was hoped that approving Khaw's application would persuade him to stay on for longer. Blades felt it important to maintain continuity during his efforts to remould the police to be more locally-officered.[52]

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[49] FCO 141/14950, Calderwood to Morris, 10 January 1957.
[50] Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story*, p. 329.
[51] FCO 141/14950, Khaw K to Black, 5 October 1957.
[52] FCO 141/14950, Minute by Black, 11 November 1957.

Khaw's application was accepted, but in defiance of Blades' hopes, he gave notice of his intention to retire with effect on 20 April 1959. The government had no choice but to accept. The Governor was frustrated, feeling that Khaw was spurning the opportunities given to him. Blades had by now lost confidence in Khaw, who had gone on leave and was reading in a local law firm (as well as harbouring political ambitions). It was thought best that he remain on leave and not resume duties in Special Branch.[53] This particular attempt at 'Malayanisation' proved an embarrassing failure for the outgoing British regime. The next Special Branch Director, Eric Linsell, was a British officer who had served in Palestine, the Straits Settlements and Singapore (specialising in anti-narcotics investigations since 1953). Although not a veteran Special Branch officer, Linsell was an experienced colonial police officer: hardly an endorsement for the successes of 'Malayanisation' initiatives.

As the Malayanisation of the police shows, the road to decolonisation had a significant impact upon local intelligence organisation and the culture of Special Branch. Security intelligence was forced to operate in a more politically sensitive environment. The same dictates applied equally to the regional-national intelligence community. SIFE and SIS saw some of their activities curtailed as their Cold War goals conflicted with the evolving realities of decolonisation. Singapore historians have suggested that in conflicts between decolonisation and security, the Cold War security imperative governed decisions.[54] Although this is broadly true, the nuance can be added that decolonisation also affected the way Britain approached Cold War intelligence and security operations. It forced the British to rethink their priorities, ultimately leading to a preference to maintain access to intelligence even if diluting their control over it (so long as they could trust the successor government). Ironically, the decision to appoint a Singaporean as Director of Special Branch only delayed this process.

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[53] FCO 141/14950, Goode to Lennox-Boyd, 12 January 1959.
[54] Lau, 'Decolonisation and the Cold War in Singapore', p. 44; Tan, 'The Cold War and the Making of Singapore', p. 148, 164.

Safe for decolonisation?

Security intelligence was an object of decolonisation negotiations. It was also a vital tool in ensuring this process went smoothly. Principally, intelligence gathered by Special Branch ensured that the growing threat from a communist front movement (centred upon the personality of Lim Chin Siong) did not interfere with British plans for an orderly transfer of power to a pro-British and non-communist successor government.

By 1955, the MCP underground was no longer a serious threat to the governance of the colony. However, as Singapore prepared for increasing local autonomy, the threat from 'front' organisations controlled by individual communists or penetrated by underground members came to dominate Special Branch efforts. This was similar to the tactics adopted by the MCP before 1948, when front parties such as the Malayan Democratic Union were used to expand communist influence.

Three aspects of the communist front movement required monitoring. Initially the strongest strand was the student movement. Following successful police action against communist underground networks in 1953-55, communist-sympathising students represented the best organised remnant of the old MCP and ABL system. The student threat rose to prominence as a result of the government's National Service Ordinance, which required all young people to register for national service by 22 May 1954. This led to demonstrations and sit-ins which, although failing to achieve concessions, awakened an anti-colonial consciousness amongst Chinese students which communist activists could exploit. In 1954, the Singapore Chinese Middle School Students Unions (SCMSSU) was formed, which rapidly recruited 10,000 members. This union was controlled by MCP-affiliated elements and appeared to be a front organisation.[55]

The intentions and capabilities of the student front movement were the subject of research by one of the SIFE officers implanted in Special Branch from 1954-56. This research concluded that the principal objective of their leaders did not appear to be the attainment of any specific concessions but to cause unrest. However, SIFE and Special Branch were unsure how far the MCP retained

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[55] Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution*, pp. 82-84; Lee, *The Open United Front*, pp. 51-52.

control of front organisations such as the SCMSSU. The students appeared to be in defiance of the official MCP line on peaceful penetration: 'the students' behaviour suggests therefore that they are prepared to defy the MCP no less than they do the authority of their parents, teachers and the law'. Alternative influences could include the CCP or international communist organisations such as the International Union of Students.[56] Security intelligence experts did not know entirely who – if anyone – was directing student activities, and could only guess at their motivations. This made the perceived communist front a more serious threat than a specific communist party such as the MCP.

In addition to students, unionised labour proved a fertile breeding ground for communist fronts. These proved easier intelligence targets than the student movements, and were more reliably traced back to MCP inspiration and probable direction.

Communist-inspired labour activities attained significance in May 1955 when a strike at the Hock Lee Bus Company led to rioting. This was partly due to hostility between CCP and Guomindang affiliated Chinese, as the Singapore Bus Workers Union was influenced by the former, whilst the Hock Lee owners were known Guomindang sympathisers. The SCMSSU came out on strike in support, forcing the government to rescind certain demands. After a peaceful resolution to the dispute, the SCMSSU was officially registered on condition that it no longer participate in political activities: a pledge which the students soon broke.[57]

Special Branch quickly identified the Singapore Factory and Shop Workers Union (SF&SWU) as the core of the communist labour front. Although formed in 1953, once an ex-detainee named Lim Chin Siong assumed the position of Secretary-General in March 1955, membership soared from 1,354 to nearly 23,000 in just five months. In addition, the SF&SWU led a so-called 'Middle Road' coalition (named after the location of their main offices in downtown Singapore). This coalition of unions accounted for a further 7,000 workers. Control was exercised through SF&SWU officials, including ex-'university case' ABL detainees Devan Nair and James Puthucheary, holding additional offices in

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[56] FCO 141/15164, SIFE/Special Branch appreciation of the threat posed by Chinese Middle School students, 28 May 1955.
[57] Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution*, pp. 84-85, 108-110.

these other unions. In total, the SF&SWU accounted for around 34% of organised labour in Singapore.[58]

During May-June 1955, the Middle Road group threatened sympathy strikes over a harbour dispute, leading Chief Minister David Marshall to agree to negotiate with Lim Chin Siong over the release of detainees. This was against the advice of the British administration, which would have preferred a more coercive solution. Ultimately, Marshall did not give any concessions, and the new Preservation of Public Security Ordinance (passed in October 1955) strengthened the powers of the police. Previously Marshall has rescinded some of the Emergency Regulations, and his reaction to the events of 1955 was to backtrack in favour of Britain's security agenda.[59] What this episode demonstrated to Special Branch, however, was that the SF&SWU was willing to foment labour unrest for political ends. Whilst there was no evidence of direct control by the MCP, such direction was unnecessary with suspected or known communists such as Lim Chin Siong and Devan Nair in control.[60] Information from a top secret source in March 1955 indicated that Lim Chin Siong was directly connected with the MCP, and also that he had a strong following in the Malayan Textile Mills where several workers were MCP 'E' Branch affiliates.[61]

As well as students and labour, the third field penetrated by the communist front was that of politics. On 21 November 1954, a new People's Action Party was formed: the party which would win the 1959 elections and form the government to which Britain transferred power. However, in 1954-55, the rise of the PAP to dominance was not predicted by British intelligence. They were more concerned with the extent to which this fringe party was a communist front organisation. The seeming collaboration of the PAP with known front members

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[58] FCO 141/15951, Supplement to Singapore Police Intelligence Journal 8/55, 'Assessment of the threat posed by the control and influence over the trade union movement by Lim Chin Siong', August 1955.

[59] Lee, *The Open United Front*, pp. 85-86.

[60] FCO 141/15951, Supplement to Singapore Police Intelligence Journal 8/55, 'Assessment of the threat posed by the control and influence over the trade union movement by Lim Chin Siong', August 1955.

[61] FCO 141/15951, Supplement to Singapore Police Intelligence Journal April 1955, 'People's Action Party'.

blurred the divisions between communism, socialism and nationalism, creating new problems for the security intelligence machine.[62]

In the Legislative Assembly election of 1955, three out of four competing PAP candidates were successful: Lee Kuan Yew, Goh Chew Chua and Lim Chin Siong. The fourth, Devan Nair, failed to be elected. At this early stage, Special Branch was unsure how far the party constituted a subversive threat. Certainly it was formed of anti-colonial, socialist-leaning dissidents. Lim Chin Siong, also the SF&SWU leader, appeared to be 'a typical young communist' who was briefly detained on suspicion of ABL membership after he organised a school examinations boycott in 1951. Although information about the PAP leadership was scanty, they appeared to be cultivating a united front of youths, workers and peasants in conformity with communist tradition. One Special Branch informant suggested that the MCP had instructed some of its members to join and infiltrate the PAP.[63]

Special Branch was more sanguine about the PAP's leader, Lee Kuan Yew, who appeared to be personally opposed to communism. Their concern was whether Lee would be able to control the extremist elements in the party. The PAP leadership was summarised as being 'fellow travellers playing with uncontrollable forces'. Evidence in Lee's favour included his early cooperation with the police. In January 1955, Lee received an overture from the MCP which indicated they would support any anti-colonial party, which he passed on to Special Branch. This seemed to be an attempt to woo the PAP to the side of the MCP. He handed over further documents the following month.[64]

Lee Kuan Yew had been under watch since he left to study law in England with his fiancée Kwa Geok Choo. Upon their return to Singapore in 1950, SIFE passed on reports from the Cambridge Police to Singapore Special Branch about their activities. Special Branch director Nigel Morris requested further information be obtained through MI5 channels.[65] The information received was becalming. The Singapore Commissioner of Police, R. E. Foulger, had been

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[62] Yew, 'Managing Plurality', p. 165.
[63] FCO 141/15951, Supplement to Singapore Police Intelligence Journal 4/55, 'People's Action Party', April 1955.
[64] Ibid.
[65] FCO 141/14439, Morris to Governor's Secretary, 22 June 1950.

staying at his home in Devonshire whilst Lee (then using the anglicised name of Harry Lee) and Kwa were at Cambridge and hosted them for a weekend in November 1949. Foulger formed a good impression of Lee, with whom he played golf, surmising that 'treated properly, Harry Lee will be an asset to this country; treated wrongly, he might become a red hot opponent'.[66] Upon Lee's return, Morris had recommended he be detained for questioning, but Foulger overruled him, arguing that there was more to gain by befriending and winning over the talented young Lee.[67]

Even before his involvement in politics, Lee Kuan Yew was therefore treated as a person of interest by British intelligence. When Lee was about to enter politics with the founding of the PAP, two Special Branch officers invited Lee and his wife for an informal dinner in order to better assess his leanings. Whilst Kwa spent the evening trying to keep her husband away from alcohol in case he spoke too candidly, the Special Branch officers – Cheng and Finch – tried to provoke Lee into revealing his inner feelings. They reminded him of the proverb that it is easy to ride a tiger, but then you cannot get off without being eaten. Lee replied that he would ride the communist tiger, get off it and beat it. They subsequently filed an assessment concluding that Lee was definitely not a communist and was just opportunistically aligning with leftists until the power base of his moderate faction was secure. This prediction proved correct.[68] Meanwhile, SIS inserted its own man into Lee's circle: the journalist, propagandist and ex-SOE officer Alex Josey. Josey's leftist activities caused the CIA some worry until they were reassured that he was, in fact, 'working on' Lee for British intelligence.[69]

Conversely, Special Branch investigations confirmed that Lim Chin Siong, previously only suspected of communist leanings, was indeed a communist.[70] In

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[66] FCO 141/14439, Minute by Foulger, 24 June 1950.

[67] Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story*, p. 133.

[68] NAS 001458, Interview with Willian Cheng, reel 6.

[69] Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny*, p. 146.

[70] This interpretation remains divisive. Both the British and Lee Kuan Yew consistently depicted Lim Chin Siong as a communist, but some more recent historians such as Tim Harper have questioned this.: T. N. Harper, 'Lim Chin Siong and the Singapore Story', in *Comet in Our Sky: Lim Chin Siong in History*, ed. by Poh Soo Kai, 2nd edn (Singapore: SIRD, 2015), pp. 3-55 (p. 19). See also: S. R. J. Long, 'Mixed up in Power Politics and the Cold War: the Americans, the ICFTU and Singapore's Labour Movement, 1955-1960', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 40(2) (2009), 323-352 (p. 329). The recently released intelligence archives consulted for this study support the dominant 'communist' interpretation, although given who created these records (Special Branch),

one operation, Chinese Special Branch officer William Cheng, recruited because his father (a Guomindang diplomat) was an old acquaintance of the JIC(FE) Chairman, was raiding a pineapple canning factory looking for an MCP underground official. Instead, he found a biscuit tin containing minute MCP documents written on rice paper. Chief Inspector Lau Siew Foo, who, as well as having survived an assassination attempt, was a handwriting expert, proved that these documents were written by Lim Chin Siong.[71] Further evidence accumulated from December 1955, when an arrested suspect named Set Chay Tuan identified Lim as the person who cultivated him into joining the ABL, organising him into a cell and giving him MCP publications to study. The arrest of further members of Seet's cell corroborated these charges.[72]

These Special Branch appreciations of the various elements of what was referred to as the communist front movement helped direct government action during the crisis which arose in autumn 1956. By this time, David Marshall had been replaced as Chief Minister by Lim Yew Hock, who was more willing to use coercive action to curtail front activities. On 24 September 1956, the government ordered the dissolution of the SCMSSU and expulsion of 142 students for subversive activities. In reaction, students organised sit-ins and Lim Chin Siong began preparations for a general strike. After a government deadline to the students and their parents expired, force was used to clear the schools on the morning of 26 October 1956. Within a few hours, Singapore succumbed to widespread rioting.[73]

The government's response was two-fold. Firstly, they implemented Operation Photo: a joint police and armed service plan for riot control drawn up because such a situation was foreseen following the failure of Marshall's talks. Anti-riot tactics included road blocks, rigid curfews and using helicopters to drop tear, smoke and dye grenades to break up crowds. These operations were deemed an unequivocal success in restoring order by 30 October. The government

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this is unsurprising and therefore uncertainty regarding Lim's inner motivations remains. It can however be said that he acted deliberately in favour of communist interests and was in contact with the underground MCP.

[71] NAS 001458, Interview with William Cheng, reel 1.

[72] FCO 141/14775, Supplement to Singapore Police Intelligence Journal January 1957, Appendix H: Precis of the case for the detention of Lim Chin Siong.

[73] Lee, *The Open United Front*, pp. 126-130.

attributed this to learning the lessons of the Maria Hertogh riots in 1950 and embarking on regular planning and joint civil-military exercises to hone their techniques.[74]

Secondly, to forestall a general strike, Special Branch simultaneously raided the SF&SWU Middle Road headquarters and branch offices at 2:00 AM on 27 October. They arrested 219 suspects, including Lim Chin Siong, and recovered a large amount of documents for processing. These documents justified the action taken, proving that the SF&SWU was guilty of inciting an unlawful, politically-motivated strike. In turn this justified the legal dissolution of the SF&SWU. The intelligence gained in the Middle Road raid gave Special Branch further insight into the communist front.[75]

Good security intelligence was a vital factor in explaining the major blow dealt to the communist front in autumn 1956. Special Branch study of organisations such as the SF&SWU and personalities including Lim Chin Siong meant that they were prepared to take rapid action to forestall an escalation of unrest. The knowledge was already in place to enable the arrest of the most troublesome communist activists. This was justified by the discovery – after the raid on Middle Road – of how close the SF&SWU was to launching a general strike. Other factors explaining government success included an effective joint plan for riot control, the close cooperation of Chief Minister Lim Yew Hock, and miscalculation by Lim Chin Siong in provoking such decisive retaliation.[76] As with the incidents of April 1948, communists and their sympathisers overreached themselves and provided justification for their own censure.

In the aftermath of the disturbances, the effective production of security intelligence and its dissemination to an audience prepared to take action continued to be of paramount importance. By summer 1957, Special Branch were concerned that a new united front was forming. Whilst the focus previously had been on workers and students, in 1957, this front was oriented around particular cultural groups within the PAP. The chief methods of mass mobilisation employed by this

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[74] FCO 141/15167, Report on the October 1956 riots by the General Officer Commanding and Commissioner of Police.
[75] FCO 141/14773, Blades to Goode, 31 October 1956.
[76] Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution*, pp. 136-137.

new united front were celebration functions or picnics where cultural performances or 'typical communist behaviour' (such as study groups or regimentation) were observed. As a result of consistent surveillance of these events, Special Branch drew up a plan for 50 arrests.[77]

The Special Branch plan was in response to fears that the PAP Central Executive Committee was on the brink of succumbing to communist control. At a party conference on 4 August 1957, six leftist members were elected to the twelve-person committee. Lee Kuan Yew refused to take office as he was not willing to be a puppet of the communists.[78]

The result was Operation Apple: a move against the communist united front with the full support of Lim Yew Hock on 22 August 1957. A total of 39 people were arrested, although one was a case of mistaken identity. The 38 detained comprised 19 leaders of the PAP Cultural and Education Committee (including five members of the Central Executive Committee), 15 union leaders affiliated with the dissolved Middle Road group, and four members of the *Sin Pao* newspaper: a mouthpiece of leftist activity. The goal was to disrupt the penetration and subversion of legitimate political and labour processes.[79] One of those arrested, the secretary of the PAP Bukit Panjong branch, admitted being instructed by the MCP to join the PAP and stand as a candidate at the next Assembly elections.[80] Captured MCP documents translated by Special Branch were disclosed as part of a government command paper to justify this bold move to the public. These were selected to show how the MCP intended to infiltrate the PAP to change its policies from within.[81]

In September 1957, Special Branch followed up on this success with action against the student front in Operation Banana. This was the culmination of long-term investigations into cell meetings and picnics where communist cultural performances were exhibited. 48 students were arrested on 25 September, followed by the Principal of Chung Cheng School the following day. Intelligence

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[77] FCO 141/14774, Special Branch analysis of security situation as on 1 August 1957.
[78] Lee, *The Open United Front*, p. 150.
[79] FCO 141/15164, Special Branch report to SIC, 28 August 1957.
[80] FCO 141/15164, Special Branch report to SIC, 24 September 1957.
[81] CO 1030/578, Singapore command paper 33/1957, 'The Communist Threat in Singapore', 23 August 1957.

gained from documents and interrogations more than confirmed police suspicions that the 'indoctrination and subversion of students has never been known to have been conducted so brazenly on such a scale before'. From the home of one arrested student, 525 copies of 22 different seditious songs were seized. The lyrics of one song included:

> Don't be afraid of wolves and jackals that are in front of us,
> Don't be afraid of tigers and leopards that are behind us,
> Heighten our spirit and be brave! Load our guns and shoot them dead.[82]

These two operations – Apple and Banana – dealt a devastating blow to the communist front. The extent to which Lee Kuan Yew was complicit in these actions is uncertain. Lim Yew Hock certainly implied that he had been tidying up Lee's house for him. Lee found himself having to steadfastly deny any involvement.[83] It is perhaps worth recalling that Lee was not averse to passing communist material onto Special Branch and tipping them off about MCP overtures to the PAP. Certainly his moderate faction benefited enormously from Operation Apple. In spring 1958, Lee met secretly with the latest MCP leader in Singapore: Fong Chong Pik (also known as Fang Chuang-Pi or 'The Plen'). 'The Plen' agreed to cut ties with all political movements other than the PAP, sacrificing the shattered remnants of the united front and leaving the MCP at the mercy of Lee's good faith. Organised communism was all but dead. Moreover, as the British were increasingly aware, Lee had no intention of working with communists.[84]

Nevertheless, following the conclusion of a constitutional agreement with Lim Yew Hock which set a date for self-government, the British administration could not afford to be complacent. There remained the potential threat of power in the PAP being usurped by the leftist faction. A Special Branch report of September 1957 continued to refer to the PAP as a 'crypto-communist' party.[85]

In conversation with a member of the United States Consulate-General, Lee Kuan Yew stated that there were ten times more pro-communist than moderate cadres in the PAP. This conversation, reported to the British via the

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[82] FCO 141/15164, Special Branch report to SIC, 11 October 1957.

[83] FCO 141/14783, Note by Goode, 2 January 1958; Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story*, p. 271.

[84] Barr, *Singapore*, p. 107.

[85] FCO 141/15164, Special Branch report to SIC, 11 September 1957.

SLO, was actually more comforting than disturbing. Lee implied that he would rather go into coalition than attempt to run a government on his own if there seemed to be a risk of a communist takeover of the PAP. He believed that, so long as British troops remained, the constitution would be able to work. Lee admitted that prior to the British offer of self-government, he would have regarded communism as a lesser evil than colonialism, but he was now willing to work with Britain to achieve full independence through the interim period of self-government.[86]

However, a more pessimistic view of Lee's chances of controlling the PAP was forwarded by the Special Branch Research Unit in May 1958. The Research Unit compared statements from PAP City Council members with recent statements from Beijing Radio. They argued that the PAP was deliberately imitating China, thus conforming to international communist policy, and adopting PRC lines as their own policy within a couple of weeks of their broadcast.[87] Khaw Kai Boh noted that PAP success in the City Council elections was 'a textbook example of how the party with communist association and training could take over the country through the polls'. The Special Branch Director worried that Lee's opportunistic appropriation of communist tactics may 'have created a monster of such magnitude which they will find incapable to control', and feared a repeat of August 1957.[88] These views appear to have been only a minority reaction within Special Branch and British intelligence more broadly.

The assessments produced by the likes of Special Branch were influential on the way that metropolitan actors saw the PAP. A Colonial Office memorandum of February 1958 noted that 'the PAP is virile, energetic, well-organised, devoutly socialist, nationalist and anti-colonial' but that under its present leaders it was not communist. Because of the need to appeal to youths, forming around 50% of Singapore's population (and certainly the most vocal element), the PAP sometimes engaged in knowingly irresponsible actions. Lee Kuan Yew defended this strategy as an 'invidious necessity' to attract mass support away from the communist camp. Nevertheless, the Colonial Office was confident that a

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[86] FCO 141/14783, Minute by B. Russell Jones (Singapore SLO), 24 February 1958.
[87] FCO 141/14783, Memorandum by Special Branch Research Unit, 'PAP Present Policy in the City Council and Present International Communist Policy', 29 May 1958.
[88] FCO 141/14783, Khaw to Chief Secretary, 29 May 1958.

government headed by Lee Kuan Yew would satisfy the British requirements of being responsible, willing to work within the new constitution, and resolved to frustrate any communist conspiracy. In private, Lee appeared frightened by the dangers presented by communism and had praised Lim Yew Hock's strong action against subversion. Following government action in Operation Apple, when the PAP extremists overplayed their hand, Lee was able to reconstitute the party on more moderate lines and publicly adopt a more anti-communist stance.[89]

At a special conference of the PAP in November 1958, the Party approved a resolution to hold their conference every two years rather than annually. Special Branch interpreted this as a tactical move by Lee to keep the moderate leaders in power for longer and remove chances of the party machine falling into the hands of extremists. The moderates were increasingly open in defining themselves as non-communists.[90]

As a result, by the time of the landmark elections in May 1959, the British administration was confident that, whatever the outcome, Singapore was safe for decolonisation. Because of decisive police action, informed by good intelligence and a comprehensive Special Branch registry of subversive personalities, only 15 out of a total of 194 electoral candidates were deemed of any security interest.[91] Continual reporting by Special Branch and contacts between intelligence officers and Lee Kuan Yew from as early as 1950 ensured that British policy-makers accepted that Lee was not a communist. Although worried that he may not be able to maintain control over leftist influences within his party, these concerns abated following the detention of Lim Chin Siong in October 1956 and Operations Apple and Banana in 1957.

This alludes to an important continuity in Singapore's history. Special Branch was at the forefront of an internalised Cold War centred upon Singaporean politics in the 1950s. It remained as such after 1959. Lee Kuan Yew had maintained contact with the intelligence and security machine of the colonial state during his years of opposition. He benefitted (whether intentionally or tacitly)

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[89] FCO 141/14766, Colonial Office memorandum, 'Singapore – Political Situation and Outlook', 10 February 1958.
[90] FCO 141/15165, Special Branch report to SIC, 26 November 1958.
[91] FCO 141/14766, Lennox-Boyd to Goode, 13 May 1959.

from the security actions undertaken by the colonial authorities and Lim Yew Hock in 1957. Once in power, Lee continued to work closely with the security apparatus. By 1959, organised communism in Singapore was practically dead. However, Lee continued to maintain its spectre in order to publicly denounce his opponents. This culminated in Operation Cold Store: the mass arrest of supposed pro-communist activists in February 1963. Lee's willingness to use Cold War narratives and the anti-communist security machine sometimes dismayed even British diplomatic observers.[92] The irony, of course, was that this legacy was their own bequest to Lee.

Summary

The implementation of self-government for Singapore in 1959 was an intelligence success story. By the late 1950s, Britain's policy towards Singapore was driven by a desire to make the colony 'safe for decolonisation'.[93] Such 'safety' meant transferring power to a non-communist (and preferably anti-communist) regime which would allow the retention of bases, continued security influence, and maintain a British-imposed intelligence culture. In the short term, efforts by MI5, SIFE and Special Branch achieved these goals, even if their success was overtaken by events as Britain increasingly sought to divest its commitments in Southeast Asia by the end of the 1960s. Security intelligence was at the heart of Singapore's decolonisation, both as an object of negotiations and as a mechanism for ensuring a safe transfer of power. Although Special Branch struggled to marshal information on the communist underground in the early 1950s, by the second half of the decade, they had amassed sufficient information about the open communist front to enable targeted counter-action. This was a success for security intelligence production, but even more so for its dissemination. The intelligence produced by Special Branch was decisive for guiding action at the local level. It was equally important for guiding metropolitan opinions, persuading the British government that Lee Kuan Yew was a safe pair of hands.

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[92] Barr, *Singapore*, p. 108.
[93] Long, *Safe for Decolonisation*, p. 137.

Lacking the level of information available to Britain, the United States was less sanguine after the 1959 elections. The CIA tried (unsuccessfully) to recruit a Special Branch officer as an agent to report on the PAP government. When Richard Corridon informed Lee Kuan Yew, the latter instructed him to 'remember all the time that we are not dealing with an enemy, but the bloody stupidity of a friend'. Special Branch picked up the CIA case officer who was quietly sent back to America.[94] According the recollections of one CIA officer, the United States government had tried to buy off Lee Kuan Yew's government with two million dollars to quickly release all their arrested and disgraced staff involved in the case, but Lee refused to be bribed.[95] This unfortunate incident in Anglo-American relations reinforced the importance of security intelligence to the Singapore decolonisation process. Britain had reliable intelligence and therefore trusted Lee Kuan Yew; America did not trust Lee Kuan Yew and thus tried to gather more intelligence. This incident would also seem to imply that Anglo-American intelligence sharing in Southeast Asia had not improved since the earlier 1950s.

Also at the national and regional levels, agencies such as MI5 and SIFE contributed to the general withdrawal from Empire by making preparations for future liaison with independent nations. This complimented their existing intelligence diplomacy, such as the training and support given to SEATO members. MI5 policy in this period was successful in ensuring continued access to locally-produced intelligence in Malaya and Singapore. In return, they continued to offer guidance on intelligence organisation as preparations were made for the creation of a unified Malaysia in 1963.

This is not to say that the decolonisation process was entirely plain-sailing for the intelligence community. The 'Malayanisation' of Special Branch had its complexities, not in the least the embarrassment caused by Khaw Kai Boh's decision to resign before the PAP came into power. But these setbacks were only minor deviations in the general march of progress, which was facilitated to a significant extent by a highly effective system of intelligence and policing.

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[94] NAS 000044, Interview with Richard Corridon, reel 7.
[95] Smith, *Portrait of a Cold Warrior*, p. 204.

8. Conclusion: A 'slough of despond'?

> Conditioned by grade-B movies and Joseph Conrad's novels, I had envisioned Singapore as a murky, slatternly place, peopled by sinister Chinese who lived in corrugated-roof shacks looking over a harbour crowded with rusty coastal freighters and decrepit junks. The contrast, the reality, could not have been greater. The harbour, for example, as seen from the US naval attaché's launch, was very large and orderly […] Even the legendary Raffles Hotel turned out to be a pleasant stone structure, not bamboo and attap fronds, and the air conditioning at the Elizabethan Grill was so aggressive it froze us stiff at lunch […] The other guests expanded at length about the delightful living in Singapore, 'the finest residential city in the Far East'. I made a mental note.[1]

As this observation shows, CIA officer Russell Jack Smith found Singapore to be something of a surprise. On a personal level, he had expected an old-world, jingoistic version of an 'Oriental' city, and discovered a modern and efficient hub of commerce, high society and modernity. On the professional level, having toured round Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland Southeast Asia, he was equally surprised to discover in Singapore an intelligence goldmine. Singapore was not just the centre of gravity for the British Empire in the Far East. Intelligence officers such as Smith and his British counterparts also saw Singapore as a unique meeting point of cultures. Singapore was almost part of Malaya, with a young and vibrant Chinese population divided in loyalty between various shades of nationalists, communists and those who were pragmatically tolerant of colonial rule. It was close enough to mainland Southeast Asia to be useful as a base for covert action and sufficiently juxtaposed to Indonesia to attract the attention of government agents, rebels and Dutch spies. As a result, Singapore became a Cold War spy city. It even had the occasional (largely uneventful) visit from high-profile Soviet spies.[2] This view, shared by British intelligence officers and their allies, depicted Singapore as a 'unique window' on Southeast Asia: the ideal place for conducting intelligence operations. However, this was an interpretation which rested upon imperialist prejudices. As implicit in Smith's observations, Singapore was also seen as uniquely comfortable. It was part of Asia but with all the conveniences of the Western model of modernity.

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[1] Smith, *The Unknown CIA*, pp. 89-90.
[2] Smith, *The Unknown CIA*, p. 90; Smith, *Portrait of a Cold Warrior*, pp. 169-175.

This made Singapore an attractive place of work for a plethora of international spies.

This intelligence melting pot comprised American, Australian, Chinese, Dutch, French, Indonesian, Soviet and many other intelligence officers. At its heart was the British intelligence community (or, to be more accurate, communities). British intelligence was organised across three levels: the local, the regional and the national. Singapore was not only a physical home for the many agencies which compromised this system. It was also a conceptual focal point. From the late 1940s, Singapore was regarded as Britain's critical defence interest in the Far East. Even before the Second World War, with the opening of the Singapore naval base and realisation of the strategic vulnerability of Hong Kong, Singapore had assumed its status as the nerve centre of British defence and intelligence in 1939.

However, not everybody in the British government was satisfied with this state of affairs. The Permanent Under Secretary of the Foreign Office seemed to think of the Singapore intelligence system as 'a slough of despond in South East Asia'.[3] Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick voiced this opinion at a time when the British government was thinking about cutting back on its commitments to Southeast Asia. The question was one of cost versus value. Ultimately, although the overall size of the Commissioner General's establishment was reduced, intelligence activities continued largely unhindered. SIFE, SIS, RIO and the joint and service intelligence organisations retained their organisations in Singapore, and adapted their activities to the evolving environment of the Cold War and decolonisation. The 'unique window' view appeared to prevail.

This thesis has revolved around three important themes. Firstly, it has evaluated the relationship between the three levels of intelligence, interrogating their organisation, working culture and impact, to ascertain the nature of the British intelligence community in Singapore. Overall, it is clear that there were two closely associated but nevertheless distinct British intelligence communities in Singapore: a local one and a regional-national one. Secondly, this discussion has shown that intelligence (particularly security intelligence) played a very

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[3] KV 4/426, Note of discussion between White and Kirkpatrick, 13 January 1955.

significant role in Singapore's post-war evolution. This has shed new light on the urban counterpart to the Malayan Emergency, British priorities in the decolonisation of Singapore, and the continuity between colonial and post-colonial regimes. Finally, this thesis considers two contradictory views proposed by intelligence practitioners and their consumers: the 'unique window' and 'slough of despond' interpretations. It is evident that the former was dominant, but the reasons for this are worth delineating.

Understanding an intelligence community

The three-tier model of intelligence was not unique to Singapore. Britain created similar intelligence architectures for the post-war Middle East and, to a lesser extent, in Central Africa. Understanding how these systems worked in practice reveals how Britain conceptualised and sought to enact its intelligence empire in the age of decolonisation and the Cold War. When considering Singapore and the Far East, it appears more accurate to talk of two intelligence communities: a regional-national community, and a local intelligence community. The distinction between the two can be seen across the three main areas of analysis used by this thesis: intelligence organisation, intelligence culture and intelligence impact.

The organisation of intelligence is critical to understanding its hierarchies, the status of different agencies and activities, and its relationship with users. In the early post-war years, the regional intelligence architecture was most influenced by concerns relating to perceived 'lessons' of the Second World War and the emerging Cold War national intelligence agenda. Highest status was accorded to service and joint intelligence organisations, and, through the authority of the JIC, strategic intelligence was invested with highest priority. This community was already very close to its parent organisations in the metropole. Concurrently, the local intelligence machine, although resurrected quite easily by experienced officers like Alan Blades, was shaped into an anachronistic structure more suitable to the pre-war colonial architecture than post-1945 realities. The outbreak of the Malayan Emergency catalysed the revision and expansion of these intelligence networks in response to the developing Cold War in Southeast Asia. Unlike in

Europe, this conflict was as much about combatting insurgencies and other threats to imperial security as it was a strategic stand-off with communist great powers. This entailed a greater focus on counter-subversion and regional security, benefitting the status of agencies such as SIFE and SIS(FE) which could contribute to these priorities. The creation of the JID in 1950, by pooling the political capital of these two agencies, further enhanced their centrality to regional intelligence. From 1949, regional intelligence agencies were housed alongside their principal consumers in Phoenix Park, resolving some of the tensions which previously existed between producers and their users.

Following the outbreak of the Malayan Emergency and the changes it provoked, consistent organisational trends began to develop. Within the regional-national intelligence community, security intelligence continued to increase in importance and status. This created greater synergy with local intelligence, in which security was by far the major priority, but organisational practices continued to divide the two communities. At the regional-national level, security intelligence was essentially non-executive and advisory. Locally, the Singapore Special Branch was an integral part of the police and part of the enforcement machinery. This proved very effective in enabling intelligence to be disseminated to influence timely action. During the Harbour Board unrest of April 1948, as well as the more protracted campaign against the underground MCP from 1948-55, Special Branch responded to tactical intelligence in an effective manner. The police operations they led, although essentially reactive, prevented a more successful MCP campaign and kept a lid on communist activities. These local intelligence efforts were largely self-supporting and separate from the regional-national levels, although the dramatic events of 1950 led to slightly more interest – and intrusion – from higher up the hierarchy.

As the 1950s wore on, the evolving complexity of Cold War problems prompted further changes to regional intelligence. Nevertheless, the status relationships which emerged in the wake of the Malayan Emergency remained unaltered. The JIC remained central to the overall intelligence cycle, and SIFE and SIS(FE) were the most pertinent instruments of these changes. Although the rise of communist China proved to be an intractable intelligence target, changes in Southeast Asia prompted more positive developments. The birth of a new

communist state in North Vietnam, and the countervailing creation of a non-communist alliance through SEATO, prompted a growth in scope for regional intelligence. Throughout the 1950s, the regional and national levels continued to grow closer. The former began implementing policies devised by the latter, moving beyond narrow reporting functions.

As well as organisation, this thesis has examined the workings and operational culture of British intelligence in Singapore. Naturally this was heavily influenced by patterns of organisation. The specific organisation of Special Branch, as well as the more confined scope of problems it faced, ensured that the local intelligence culture was more exclusively focused upon counter-subversion and security than that of the regional-national community. Special Branch became reasonably effective at intelligence production due to the experience of its officers and the working culture inherited from its predecessors. It was even more effective at instrumentalising that intelligence for operational purposes. However, its production saw a discrepancy between excellent tactical and poor strategic intelligence. Such a discrepancy prevented the colonial government from wrestling greater initiative away from the MCP. Similarly, intelligence collection remained the crucial weakness of the regional-national intelligence cycle. As a result, it was sometimes difficult for intelligence assessors to provide a reliable understanding of events as they unfolded. Cold War interpretations dominated, although these were not always implicit of a monolithic or Soviet-dominated view of communism. Instead, intelligence analysis was reasonably receptive to local variations.

Throughout the 1950s, Special Branch enjoyed continued tactical success due to a combination of factors including luck, preventative policing, sound intelligence methods and a favourable operational environment. Their working culture was influenced by both their status as a police department and their task as an intelligence organisation. They consistently struggled to recover from the loss of important sources in 1950 and mainly produced tactical, reactive intelligence in dealing with the communist underground. In countering the activities of a communist united front, their long-term intelligence potential began to improve, enabling more pre-emptive operations such as Operations Apple and Banana in 1957. This period saw increasing interaction between the local and regional-

national intelligence communities due to concerns about maintaining access to intelligence after decolonisation. These interactions were shaped by power relationships, as SIFE and MI5 sought to 'improve' the intelligence culture of Special Branch and ensure that their own post-colonial intelligence needs were safeguarded. Decolonisation became an additional imperative and affected the way that intelligence actors responded to both the internal and external Cold Wars in Singapore. Security remained paramount, and Britain was not prepared to compromise without adequate guarantees that its access to intelligence would remain undiluted.

This alludes to an important observation. Contrary to the views espoused by some intelligence actors at the time and some more recent historians, in the context of the 1950s British Empire, a distinction between security intelligence and political (or colonial) intelligence makes little sense. Although these two aspects of intelligence were not entirely the same, they need to be understood together as part of a dynamic relationship. Special Branch was not just an agent of colonial political intelligence. It was a mechanism for national security intelligence, albeit working in a different way to MI5. This appreciation is significant for understanding what was meant by security intelligence and who produced it. In the specific context of the end of empires and early Cold War, security intelligence was as much the jurisdiction of police structures as of MI5 and its proxies. Outside of Britain, MI5 was reliant upon these local security machines for providing intelligence and ensuring its own efficiency. Nevertheless, defining boundaries was all about power, and MI5 sought to establish hegemony over security intelligence assessment, even if accepting that it was dependent upon Special Branches for security intelligence collection.

Evaluating the impact and influence of intelligence is more problematic. It could be argued that agencies such as SIFE were very successful in persuading Malcolm MacDonald of their particular world-view (in turn disseminated to the metropole). However, it is difficult to establish whether this was due to SIFE's influence or a coincidence of views. Nevertheless, intelligence was useful in shaping how policy-makers approached the developing Cold War, even by confirming their pre-assumptions, and not necessarily guiding specific policies. From the mid-1950s, the intelligence communities also became influential as a

means of executing foreign policy through clandestine means. This provided perhaps the greatest justification for maintaining this 'slough of despond'. They provided an avenue for policy implementation which matched British goals and capabilities. Specifically, intelligence diplomacy proved effective at building influence and alignments, even if it did little to improve information collection. Comparably, within Singapore's borders, the Emergency was the dominant theme in colonial governance from 1948-55. Special Branch was the front line in this struggle, and therefore enjoyed the full support of the administration. Special Branch was not just an intelligence producer but also a key organ in shaping Singapore's history during this turbulent period. The qualified effectiveness of Special Branch played a crucial role in determining the failure of the MCP and the confidence felt by British administrators in devolving power. The Emergency was the dominant problem for Singapore in the early 1950s, and Special Branch provided the primary means of engagement with it.

From 1955, decolonisation became an equally important dictate. The key goals of the regional-national intelligence community were to ensure an orderly transfer of power which would retain pro-British, anti-communist influence and to leave behind a British intelligence culture. The local intelligence machine proved adept at fulfilling these goals. Special Branch monitored the emergence of new political parties and ensured that policy-makers felt safe about decolonisation. They were certain that Lee Kuan Yew was not a communist, and from 1957 were increasingly optimistic about his prospects of maintain control against leftist influences within the PAP. Meanwhile, with attempts to 'Malayanise' the police proving a mixed record of success, the retention of experienced expatriate personnel, in addition to the training provided by SIFE and MI5, ensured that the local security apparatus retained a British intelligence culture during the period between the beginning of self-government in 1959 and Singapore's ultimate independence in 1965.

From analysis of these three areas, it becomes clear that there were two British intelligence communities operating in Singapore during the early Cold War: a local intelligence community, and a regional-national one. Although they were frequently interpenetrated and consulted at various stages, these communities were divided by their organisation, working practices and priorities.

For the local intelligence community, security intelligence was the dominant (and arguably the only) concern. Moreover, responsibility for security intelligence was vested in the Special Branch: an integral part of the police and in contrast to the non-executive standards of the regional-national community. At the regional-national level, security intelligence was one of the most prominent activities but had to compete for influence with other concerns. The local intelligence community demonstrated a successful capacity for tactical intelligence production. Conversely, the major recurring weakness of the regional-national community was an inability to improve the collection of raw intelligence outside Singapore. Nonetheless, both these intelligence communities had a significant impact upon Britain's pursuit of its foreign policy objectives during the Cold War and withdrawal from empire. In the first instance, intelligence communities reinforced a Cold War awareness within their consumer departments and guided perceptions of the threat. Secondly, intelligence communities were more than just passive, reporting bodies. The regional-national community offered opportunities to covertly implement Cold War policies through providing a mechanism for building up a buffer zone in the 'northern tier' of Southeast Asia, and facilitating the continuation of British influence despite dwindling overt resources. Meanwhile, the local intelligence community guided police action and shaped opinions to make sure that Singapore was safe for decolonisation.

Understanding Singapore

This thesis is not just a study of a particular intelligence model adopted by Britain in response to post-war 'lessons' and adapted to cope with Cold War demands. It also represents a new approach to Singapore's post-war history. Most existing histories have focused on Singapore's road to independence through exploring the rise of the PAP, the societal changes which facilitated it, and the negotiations between the colonisers and the colonised. A smaller body of scholarship has engaged with Singapore's place in international history; particularly how the global Cold War contributed to the form and pace of

Singapore's decolonisation.[4] These international studies have downplayed the role of the major challenger to Singapore's national security: the MCP. On the other hand, studies of the Emergency have focused not upon British reactions but upon the actions of the communists themselves and the different strategies they used.[5]

This thesis has brought into focus another aspect of Singaporean history: the role of British intelligence – particularly Special Branch – in determining Singapore's course. By highlighting the significance of this forgotten actor, two core themes become clear. Firstly, the Emergency which began in 1948 was a significant and previously undervalued aspect of the Singapore story. Although less consistently violent than in the Federation, this struggle affected all strata of society, from ordinary citizens forced to live within the confines of Emergency Regulations to local businessmen working with the fear of extortion by the communists or their criminal allies; from nationalist politicians seeking to position themselves as acceptable to the British security regime to the colonialists themselves. This was the fundamental national security concern, and intelligence was the key to its resolution. Special Branch did not just ensure the political survival of the colonial regime by weeding out communist dissidents. It was also providing for long-term security for a future independent Singapore, and supporting the police in maintaining law and order. As Carl Trocki has shown, the idea of a culture of control is an important aspect in explaining continuity in Singapore's history.[6] Security intelligence contributed to this continuity.

Although the Emergency in the Federation, and the role of intelligence services in responding to it, is a well-trodden story, concurrent events in Singapore remain less well-known. The communist campaign in Singapore was not constant, but shifted between four broad phases: political penetration and labour subversion (1946-49), overt violence against colonial and local elites (1950), underground-directed resistance and subversion of the masses (1951-55) and the development of united fronts in labour, education and politics (1955-59). This is not to say that all these strategies were not used at any one time; rather, the primary focus of MCP efforts switched from one approach to the next in a

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[4] Long, *Safe for Decolonisation*; Heng and Aljunied (eds.), *Singapore in Global History*; Lau, 'Decolonisation and the Cold War in Singapore'.

[5] Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution*; Lee, *The Open United Front*; Singh, *Quest for Political Power*.

[6] Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*.

chronology broadly consistent with this periodisation. As a result, the security machine had to evolve its responses, from longer-term intelligence efforts to more decisive action through riot control, picking off leaders and vetting potential front members. Although consistently reactive against MCP initiatives, Special Branch was successful in meeting the challenges entailed by each phase. Ultimately, their intelligence production played an important role in developing perceptions of Lee Kuan Yew as a trustworthy heir to the anti-communist colonial state.

This alludes to a second theme in the relationship between intelligence and Singapore's history. The development of an effective police and intelligence machine was a major part of the process of decolonisation. On the one hand, Special Branch removed a principal obstacle to constitutional progress by neutralising the threat from the MCP underground by 1955. Moreover, by reassuring colonial administrators and the national government in London about the reliability of Lee Kuan Yew, they created an atmosphere in which Britain felt safe to decolonise Singapore in a manner which would preserve their vital intelligence, strategic and Cold War interests. Studying the intelligence machine which developed in Singapore, consisting of both the local and regional-national intelligence communities, provides a unique window on the fascinating history of post-war Singapore in its transition from Britain's paramount interest in the Far East to an independent nation.

As this thesis has shown, Lee Kuan Yew was heavily vetted by Special Branch and MI5 in the early to mid-1950s. Moreover, he showed a willingness to inform them about MCP overtures to the PAP. Following Special Branch action against leftist elements within the PAP in 1957, Lee became more outspoken against communism. It is therefore unsurprising that, once in office from 1959, he worked effectively with Special Branch and the Internal Security Council in moving against communist influences. Operation Cold Store in 1963 fulfilled Britain's security concerns by rounding up great numbers of suspected communists. It also shows how Lee used security actors to help solidify his power. Viewed from the perspective of intelligence, the Singapore story would therefore appear one of continuity rather than new departures.

'Slough of despond' or 'unique window'?

The regional level of intelligence was consistently problematic for policy-makers. Two interpretations were apparent: the 'unique window' and the 'slough of despond'. The 'unique window' view was widely held by British intelligence practitioners and their foreign allies. This was a self-perpetuating view. By treating Singapore as a 'unique window', regional intelligence agencies encouraged other nations to do the same in order to benefit from closeness to Britain's centre of gravity. Meanwhile, in doing so, they also provided an argument to justify their own existence. In contrast, some consumers of intelligence regarded Singapore (specifically regional intelligence) as a 'slough of despond': a waste of effort and money. However, this was a minority view. The 'unique window' interpretation prevailed, but we can question how far it was objectively correct and why it held such traction. From available records, it appears that regional intelligence, although popular with its immediate users in Phoenix Park, struggled to improve intelligence collection and sometimes pursued conflicting priorities to the metropole (as seen in the debates over the China Bureau).

However, regional intelligence was valuable in other ways which moved beyond the narrow functions of the typical intelligence cycle. It supported the illusion that Britain could deal with the Southeast Asian region as a whole; it provided an avenue for coordinated Cold War activities; it served as a useful exchange point; and it supported Britain's ambitions to remain an influential great power. For these reasons, the 'slough of despond' view failed to gather traction. The British intelligence communities in Singapore were as much about implementing policy as helping to guide it. In doing so, they made themselves invaluable.

The CIA's Russell Smith encapsulated this view when he described Singapore as 'a unique window on the swirling post-World War II scene of Southeast Asia where every country from Burma to Indonesia was struggling to reach a new accommodation with changed realities'. Smith fully believed in the value of an intelligence apparatus in Singapore which could provide 'an understanding of the interplay of economic, political, and strategic forces as seen

from *within* the region, not from distant and paperbound Washington'.[7] This was the logic shared by Malcolm MacDonald and other supporters of the three-tier approach to British intelligence. They believed that a regional collation machinery based in Singapore could provide rapid assessments of locally-produced information informed by the nuances of immersion in Southeast Asia as a whole and Singapore itself. This could complement the longer-term evaluations of the national intelligence hierarchy in London.

This view rested in part upon imperialist prejudices and a preference for the comforts of Singapore over dispersion in the field. The idea of Singapore as a 'unique window' was based upon perceptions of its status as a racial, cultural and intellectual melting pot which reflected the imperialist paradigm by which the colonial government saw its subject populations. One could argue that the very concept of a 'unique intelligence window' was dependent upon an imperialist approach to knowledge-building and cultural understanding. It also reflected a preference for imposing order and generalisations upon the dynamic and very diverse post-war situation in Southeast Asia. Moreover, by choosing to create a regional administrative bureaucracy for Southeast Asia, Britain created a situation with its own unique intelligence requirements.

The particular intelligence structure which evolved from 1946 therefore constituted a 'unique window' upon how Britain saw the evolving Cold War and its own priorities. This was informed by a strong focus on imperial security. The imperative of imperial security interacted with perceptions of the Cold War to produce a British Singaporean approach to intelligence assessment. Cold War suspicions abounded, even when there was a distinct lack of available information, but regional intelligence bodies seemed never to lose sight of the principal problem: the threat of local communist movements to imperial security. This was linked with the broader Cold War through the prism of Soviet ideological inspiration and the pull factor of 'Red China'. As decolonisation became increasingly inevitable, intelligence assessors were faced with the problem of how to understand the relationship between nationalists and communists. On the whole, the latter remained the greater problem.

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[7] Smith, *The Unknown CIA*, p. 90.

The Singapore intelligence system perhaps attained its greatest significance through its ability to contribute to the implementation of policy. From the available declassified records, it is more difficult to comment upon the content and influence of intelligence assessments from the 1950s than the late 1940s. Nevertheless, it is clear that, in response to the evolving external environment, intelligence agencies – particularly at the regional level – were increasingly called upon to play a more active role in furthering British goals. In the first place, MI5 and SIFE conducted intelligence diplomacy to strengthen British influence amongst foreign partners, particularly SEATO and individual Asian powers. Although reluctant to share intelligence material due to political, cultural and security impediments, these British agencies were keen to develop relationships through training and advice. Similarly, these same techniques were used to instil a British (or Commonwealth) intelligence culture within British territories preparing for independence. This intelligence diplomacy had two primary purposes: to ensure continued access to local intelligence after decolonisation, and to support Southeast Asian states in resisting communism. In both regards, Britain appears to have been broadly successful in the short-term; at least until the withdrawal from East of Suez by the late 1960s rendered these interests largely obsolete. Meanwhile, agencies such as RIO and SIS(FE) contributed to Cold War goals through propaganda and covert action. As with intelligence diplomacy, these activities enabled Britain to engage with the Cold War discreetly and without entailing major (costly) commitments. In other words, intelligence was a way of fighting the Cold War on the quiet and on the cheap. This helped ensure the survival of regional intelligence despite certain metropolitan pressures in the mid-1950s.

It is therefore possible to understand why an intelligence system of doubtful efficacy at its core function (generating and processing intelligence) was treated as an invaluable instrument or a 'unique window'. This was an imperialist approach to Cold War intelligence, and as such, imperialist perceptions and imperial priorities dominated. Singapore was the centre of Britain's defence interests in the Far East and a key imperial stronghold. It was also perceived to be a safe and comfortable place from which to survey Southeast Asia. More tangibly, the intelligence system which evolved from 1946 did not do so in a vacuum. It

constantly adapted to meet the immediate interests of its principal consumers: the local and regional governments in Singapore. Nobody doubted that as long as there was a Commissioner General there would need to be a mid-level of intelligence between the local and national. Although the operational details of intelligence agencies remain shrouded in secrecy, it is evident that they had a noteworthy bureaucratic impact. This is measurable both in the evolution and expansion of the Phoenix Park intelligence system, and also in the perceptions of users who saw value in this system despite criticising its actual intelligence collection.

Finally, there was one way in which this system can be regarded as a genuinely 'unique window', notwithstanding the imperialist connotations of this concept. Windows, of course, can be opened, and things can pass through them. Singapore provided the ideal location to coordinate clandestine activities which moved beyond passive reporting and into the active implementation of policy. Understanding the nature of the British intelligence apparatus in Singapore therefore highlights the proactivity of Britain's approach to the Cold War in Southeast Asia in the covert realm. British spies didn't just look through the window. They opened the window, and tried to pass their influence through it.

Singapore was a 'unique window' on intelligence insofar as British imperialist intelligence organisers chose to make it so. They deliberately made Singapore the centre of the clandestine Cold War in Southeast Asia and used it to exert influence across the region. Studying British intelligence in Singapore is therefore revealing of how British intelligence approached the Cold War in Southeast Asia. It is equally revealing of how British policy-makers conceptualised Singapore during the latter stages of empire.

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