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## The Malayan Emergency as counter-insurgency paradigm

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## *The Malayan Emergency as counterinsurgency paradigm*

**Karl Hack**

**Abstract:** *The Malayan Emergency of 1948-60 has been repeatedly cited as a source of counterinsurgency lessons, with debate over the relative importance of coercion, 'winning hearts and minds', and achieving unified and dynamic control. This paper argues that all these techniques and more were important, but that their weight varied dramatically across quite distinct campaign phases. The conclusions include that effective counterinsurgency analysis must integrate cognition of such phases (there must be different 'lessons' for different phases); and that in the Malayan case rapid buildup of barely trained local as well as extraneous forces, and the achievement of area and population security, were key to turning around the campaign in the most intense phase. While persuasive techniques were always present, 'winning hearts' came to the fore more in the later optimisation phase.*

The Malayan Emergency lasted from June 1948 until 31 July 1960.<sup>1</sup> It pitted British-led forces against the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and its Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA).<sup>2</sup> Communist remnants continued to operate from the Malaysian-Thai border until a negotiated peace in December 1989.<sup>3</sup> But the British broke the back of the insurgency as a large scale campaign somewhere between 1950 and 1954. Faced with this reversal, the communists unsuccessfully attempted to negotiate an end to hostilities in 1955.<sup>4</sup>

Success in Malaya seemed all the more impressive for the terrain it was fought over. Malaya's population lived mainly on its coastal plains. But the country was dominated by a central spine of mountain and jungle. The Emergency has consequently been studied for counterinsurgency 'lessons', which can be categorised under the headings of: (1) 'population control'; (2) persuasion, or 'winning hearts and minds' through using minimum force, political concessions, and social provision; (3) command, unified and dynamic leadership; and (4) the need for security forces to become effective 'learning organisations'.

All of the above played a part in Malaya, but not an equal part in all phases. In particular, the tendency to assume all four techniques were to the fore when the Emergency was turned, and that the improvement of (2) and (4) were the key changes, is wrong. This is all the more significant as similar assumptions still pervade British and American analyses of counterinsurgency, notably those of Nagl, Petraeus and Smith.<sup>5</sup> This paper argues that these tend to raid the past to justify their prescriptions for the present. By contrast, what we need is to generate a more accurate picture of the past on its own terms, and draw conclusions from

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<sup>1</sup> C.C. Chin and Karl Hack (eds), *Dialogues with Chin Peng: New Perspectives on the Malayan Communist Party* (Singapore: Singapore University Press 2004), 116-43. Henceforth *Dialogues*.

<sup>2</sup> Older sources use Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA). MCP Secretary-General Chin Peng insists on 'National'. Chin Peng and Leon Comber (Malayan Special Branch 1950s) blame Special Branch mistranslation of *min tsu* (nation) as race. *Dialogues*, pp. 29fn 2, 148-9.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Hack, 'The Long March to Peace of the Malayan Communist Party in southern Thailand', in Michael Montesanto and Patrick Jory (eds.), *Thai South and Malay North: Ethnic Interactions on a Plural Peninsula* (Singapore: NUS Press 2008), 173-99.

<sup>4</sup> For debate about when and how, see Karl Hack, '“Iron Claws on Malaya”: The Historiography of the Malayan Emergency', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 30, 1 (March 1999), 99-125. For 1955 see *Dialogues*, 17-18, 171-85, and summary at 306-16.

<sup>5</sup> Rupert Smith's *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Penguin 2006) emphasises 'war amongst the people' superseding industrial war as the main form of modern conflict, with Malaya as an example where victory came from winning 'the will of the people' through promising independence for all and land for squatters. See 202-6. Nagl's emphasis on 'learning organisations', and Petraeus's 2006 counterinsurgency paper, are discussed below.

that. In the Malayan case, we need a more accurate understanding of the campaign's phases, in order to understand which techniques were most prominent at each stage.

The paper therefore reconstructs the main campaign phases using under-utilised sources. It suggests that the assumption that the campaign was turned mainly in 1952-54 - which underpins lessons traditionally taken from Malaya - is wrong. Instead, the back of the Emergency as high level insurgency was broken in 1950-52.<sup>6</sup> This happened with a population control and security approach to the fore, at a time when winning hearts and minds, dynamic leadership, and efficient learning were in their early stages. These latter were more central to the subsequent 'optimisation' phase of 1952-60.

The spotlight is therefore turned on the techniques most developed in the 'clear and hold' phase of 1950 to late 1952. These included: systematic population control; overwhelming numbers of security forces (40,000 British and Commonwealth troops, nearly 67,000 police including Special Constables, more than 250,000 Home Guard), and harnessing local social forces and divisions.<sup>7</sup> All brought to bear against a peak of around 8,000 insurgents, in a country the size of England without Wales, with a growing population of 5-6 million.

What is striking is the high force levels used in Malaya, and their focus in 1950-52 on securing population security, and holding populated areas continuously. 'Hearts and minds' measures below the level of high politics (the promise of ultimate independence) only intensified once territory was secured. But the tendency in recent insurgencies has been to emphasise winning hearts and minds and legitimacy coterminously with, if not prior to, securing population and spatial control. This makes it important to re-examine Malaya as a counterinsurgency paradigm. In order to do this, this paper: 1. outlines the Emergency; 2. explains how 'lessons' have been derived from it; 3. tests these against the 'real Emergency' and 4. suggests a differently weighted list of 'lessons'. First, then, the outline.

## 1. What was the Malayan Emergency?

In 1948 the Federation of Malaya was a British colonial possession. The largest communities were the Malays and 'Malaysians' (46% in 1941) and Chinese (37%), the latter mostly immigrants and their offspring.<sup>8</sup> There was a significant Indian minority.<sup>9</sup>

The source of the insurrection was the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). Founded in 1930, this had been the most effective organiser of anti-Japanese resistance from 1941-45, receiving some British assistance. From 1945-48 it had adopted a 'united front' strategy, using political and union activity, sometimes in alliance with 'bourgeois' parties. By early 1948, however, it was struggling with deportations, tightening union regulations, and a world communist turn away from 'united front' tactics. In March to May 1948 it decided to prepare for armed conflict, which it expected to break out later that year. To this end it increased violence and murder in support of labour disputes. But the British preempted communist plans by declaring a state of Emergency in June 1948.

The MCP hastily assembled guerrilla units, eventually calling them the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA). More than ninety per cent of this was Chinese, with a minority

<sup>6</sup> By the back being broken, I mean counterinsurgency achieved a trend of improvement which the insurgents were no longer able to reverse, not that activity levels were at a low level.

<sup>7</sup> The National Archives, Kew, London (henceforth TNA): Air20/10377, 'Review of the Emergency', Director of Operations (DOO), Sept. 1957, pp. 19-21, Appendix B. The 67,025 police of Jan. 1952 broke down into 22,187 regulars and 44,785 Special Constabulary.

<sup>8</sup> 'Malay' was a civilisational not a racial category, and the 46% included 'Malaysians', meaning immigrants from the region who like the Malays could speak Malay, and professed Islam.

<sup>9</sup> *Annual Report on the Malayan Union for 1946* (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printing Press).

Malays and Indians. Most Malays continued to look to the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) to protect their interests. Malay fears of becoming a minority increased the difficulty of making the MCP a broad-based, 'national' force.

While the MCP were caught off guard by the declaration of the Emergency, the British were scarcely better prepared. The 1948-49 phase was one of counter-terror. The campaign was directed by the police with army support. In practice, with little intelligence the army often rode to the sound of guns, with innocent villagers sometimes killed after British units took casualties. Whole villages were burned down and their population moved, thousands detained or deported to China.

This 'counter-terror' had double-edged results. It increased Chinese alienation and MNLA numbers, but also broke up larger guerrilla groups and prevented the loss of whole districts. Mass detention and captured insurgents also began to yield basic intelligence. Denied the ability to maintain large groups (of up to 500 in 1948-49) and easy access to jungle fringe squatters, the MNLA reorganised. Their *Min Yuen* (Mass Organisation) was restructured so that it could operate among rural squatters despite army patrols. That done, from late 1949 they launched widespread, smallscale attacks and sabotage, intended to disrupt Malaya's rubber exports, and so weaken its value to Britain.

So we already have two periods, a first of counter-terror, and a second when operations on both sides were becoming more organised and targeted. Now is a good time to introduce an overall periodisation. Below is a summary of the Emergency, drawn up in 1957 under the name of the Director of Operation's (DOO).

Figure 1

<b><u>NARRATIVE OF THE CAMPAIGN</u></b> <sup>10</sup>	
24.	The fluctuations of fortune ... fell roughly into four periods: -
(a)	<u>June 1948 – October 1949</u> . The Communist attempt to seize power by violence and revolution was held and the CTs [Communist Terrorists, a term introduced in 1952] withdrew into the jungle to reorganise for a prolonged war.
(b)	<u>October 1949 – August 1951</u> . The CTs took the offensive to seize power by violence and revolution all over Asia. A Director of Operations (Sir Harold Briggs) was appointed to coordinate civil and military measures [in April 1950], both of which were showing some serious weaknesses. By 1951 violence had reached its peak, but eliminations also began to increase as SF methods improved.
(c)	<u>August 1951 – July 1954</u> . The Briggs Plan matured, bringing the dispersed Chinese population under control, and the CTs became less aggressive in the face of large numbers of eliminations. In February 1952, General (now Field Marshal) Sir Gerald Templer, was appointed as High Commissioner and Director of Operations with full power over all civil and military resources. The CTs lost over half their strength and SF [security force] and Civilian casualties declined to less than one seventh of the 1951 peak. The back of the revolt was broken.

<sup>10</sup> Adapted from The National Archives, Kew Gardens England (henceforth TNA): Air20/10377, From: Review of the Emergency in Malaya from June 1948 to August 1957, By the Director of Operations, Malaya, September 1957

(d) July 1954 – August 1957. The crisis being over, the posts of High Commissioner and Director of Operations were again separated. CT strength dwindled steadily, as did incidents, contacts and casualties on both sides. Malayan political leaders gradually took over control in preparation for independence.

This document identifies a period (b), 1949-51, when the campaign peaked and the foundations for success were laid, and (c) from 1951-54 when ‘The back of the revolt was broken’. The DOO identifies the enabling change for these as the population control of the ‘Briggs Plan’: the comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy put in place from mid-1950 by the first Director of Operations (DOO): Lt General Sir Harold Briggs.

What was population control? It used Emergency regulations to facilitate direction of the population with minimal reference to courts. By 1950 regulations included the power to detain without trial for up to two years, mass deportation, group punishment of villages including collective fines, detention of all persons in a specified area, control of food and shops, curfews, the death penalty for carrying arms, control of printed material, and an identity card scheme for all adults.

But before the Briggs Plan, these decrees were of limited use where the population had little contact with the government. Such areas included 500,000 rural Chinese. In addition, the application of force tended to be by major sweeps or temporary operations, rather than the domination of localities. For population control to work on rural Chinese, more was needed. This was introduced by Briggs as DOO from April 1950. With the support of Sir Henry Gurney as High Commissioner, he launched the ‘Briggs Plan’. This replaced ad hoc responses to the squatter problem with an integrated approach to population and spatial control. Its five main constituent parts were as follows.

(1) Comprehensive resettlement of over 500,000 squatters, and regroupment of up to 600,000 estate labourers. Started in June, this was mostly complete by the end of 1951, after which the emphasis shifted from movement to qualitative issues.

(2), Resettlement areas (later ‘New Villages’) were brought under government administration, with resettlement officers and the intention of extending services to them.

(3) Civilian-military committees were introduced from District (District War Executive Committees, DWECs) to a Federal War Executive Committee. These brought together army, police, civil administration and Special Branch, and overrode bureaucratic sclerosis.

(4), A military framework was established, with a particular unit attached to each specific area, allowing small unit patrols and a buildup of intelligence and security. The police were redirected back to normal, rather than paramilitary, duties.

(5) The remaining forces would be concentrated as ‘striking forces’ to destroy communist forces, rolling the communists up state by state from south to north.

Security and confidence were central to the Briggs Plan and interlinked, as shown by the following Chiefs of Staff document of May 1950:

‘3 In the long run security, and with it confidence and information, can only be restored and maintained:

(a) by demonstrating Britain’s firm intention to fulfil her obligations in defence of Malaya ....

- (b) By extending effective administration and control of all populated areas which involves
  - (i) A large measure of resettlement into compact groups
  - (ii) A strengthening of local administration
  - (iii) Provision of road communication in isolated populated areas,
  - (iv) Setting up Police Posts in these areas;
- (c) by exploiting these measures with good propaganda, both constructive and destructive.

#### Outline Plan

- 4. .... to clear the country step by step, from South to North, by<sup>11</sup>:
  - (a) dominating the populated areas and building up a complete sense of security in them, with the object of obtaining a steady and increasing flow of information ...
  - (b) Breaking up the Min Yuen within the populated areas
  - (c) Thereby isolating the bandits from their food and information supply organisation in the populated areas;
  - (d) and finally destroying the bandits by forcing them to attack us on our own ground.<sup>12</sup>

The MCP response came in two pulses. Their August 1950 'Guide to the Anti-Resettlement campaign', ordered maximum action against resettlement.<sup>13</sup> This brought the campaign to a climax in 1951. But the MCP also came under strain, resulting in their 'October Resolutions'. These contained interlinked military and political recommendations, summarised by a 1953 police review of 'Aim and Strategy of the M.C.P' as follows:

'... these [October 1951] Directives aimed to sublimate the military to the political effort because a reverse policy had alienated mass support: to provide protection for the cadres engaged in political penetration and mass subversion through an adjustment in military organisation: to create more effective machinery for work amongst Malays and Indians ... whose importance from the supply point of view had been enhanced by the success of the Government's resettlement in New Villages of the Chinese: to achieve sufficiency of supply through jungle cultivation, the organisation of the Aborigines for this purpose, and the stockpiling of foodstuffs; to preserve and nourish the hard core of the MRLA [MNLA] and the Party cadres by withdrawal to safe areas in deep jungle ... and to follow a military policy of selective attack against targets of an 'imperialist' nature whereby the 'interests' of the masses would not be injured, and the primary purpose would be to capture arms and ammunition .....

The report noted plans to set up at least eleven deep jungle bases.<sup>14</sup> So the October 1951 Resolutions implied a scaling back of military activity in 1952, and an increase in mass work and subversion, which it was hoped would underpin a later resurgence of insurgency.

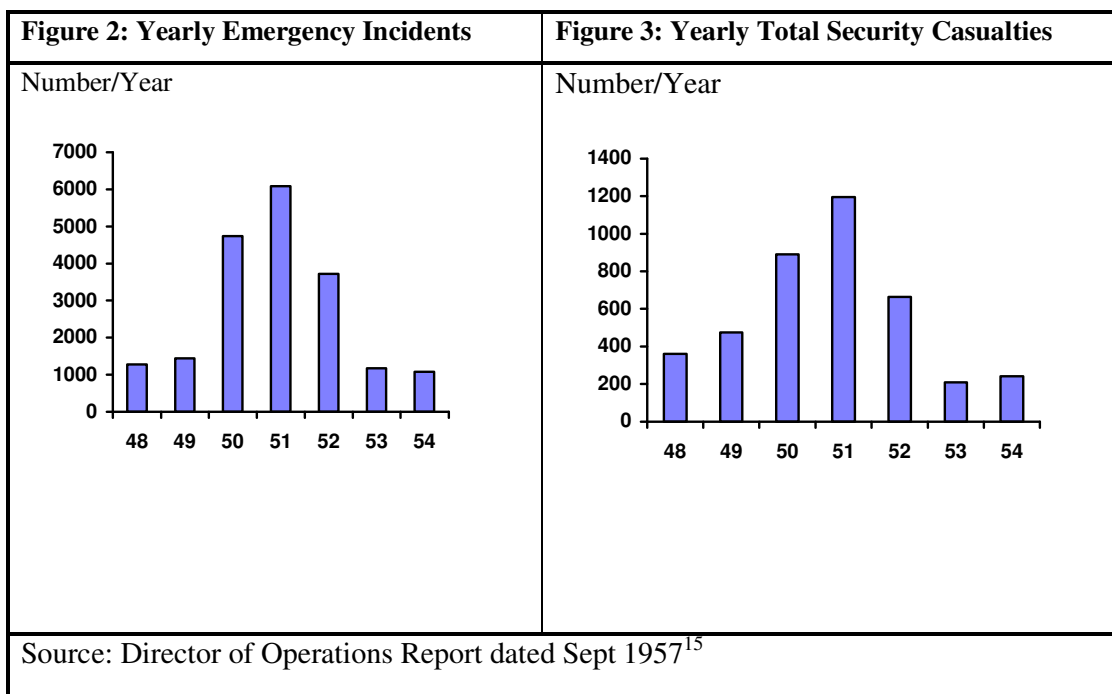
This is where interpretation of the Malayan Emergency becomes complex. By October 1951 we have the Briggs Plan's population control, and the MCP's October Resolutions. In 1952 almost every Emergency indicator would be dramatically transformed, some categories of incident falling by half in just this one year.

<sup>11</sup> The first striking forces were concentrated in Johor from 1 June 1950. But the 'roll-up' failed. Johor and Perak, states with the strongest MNLA presence, were amongst the last cleared. Later the emphasis changed to targeting areas where intelligence or insurgent weakness presented opportunities.

<sup>12</sup> TNA: Cab21/1681, MAL C(50)23, Appendix, Federation plan for the elimination of the communist armed forces in Malaya' (Briggs Plan), report COS for the Cabinet Malaya Committee, 24 May 1950. The plan was considered by the committee in July, see Anthony Stockwell, *Malaya*, II, (London: HMSO 1995), 217-21

<sup>13</sup> John Coe, 'Beautiful Flowers and Poisonous Weeds' (Unpublished D.Phil, Univ. of Queensland 1993), 167ff.

<sup>14</sup> Rhodes House, Mss British Empire s486/2/1, Misc., 53, paras 33-35, 'Short History of the Emergency', by Operations Branch, Federal Police Headquarters, 21 Oct. 1952, paras 33-34; and (F), 'Aim and Strategy of the MCP'. These are filed in the Young Papers for 1952-53 as lecture notes.



But by something else had also happened: the arrival of General Gerald Templer, with his emphasis on firm leadership and ‘winning hearts and minds’. This has often been credited with turning the campaign, because Emergency indicators remained at near peak levels in late 1951, and because of the preceding leadership crisis. Gurney had been assassinated on 6 October 1951. Briggs left in December. The incoming Conservative Secretary of State for Colonies Oliver Lyttelton had been sufficiently alarmed to visit the country in December.

Templer took up his post as High Commissioner and DOO on 17 February 1952. Previously these two posts had been separate. So Templer had unprecedented power to hire and fire, which he made it known he would use. His application of both stick and carrot can be illustrated by his approach to the Chinese. In March 1952 he imposed a 22 hour curfew on the Chinese village of Tanjong Malim after a British administrative officer was ambushed and killed nearby. He distributed questionnaires, and told villagers he would read them, and only lift restrictions if information was forthcoming. The experiment was never repeated, but the point had been made: he would not hesitate to punish non-cooperation. On the other hand, in March he made it clear that elections (already begun at municipal level) would continue, and proceeded to execute plans for giving Chinese more citizenship.

These plans fitted into the British scheme of slow progression towards full self-government. The first municipal elections were held in late 1951, under Gurney. In 1952 citizenship was extended to more Chinese, and elections to New Village Councils began soon afterwards. By 1954 there were state elections, and from late 1952 New Villages began to receive more basic schools, town halls, medical dispensaries, and generally improved amenities. National elections, which were won by an Alliance featuring the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) followed after Templer’s departure, in 1955. Constitutional discussions in London in January to February 1956 paved the way for independence on 31 August 1957.

The problem is to disentangle which of the above factors – population control, Templer’s ‘energising’ leadership, ‘winning hearts and minds’ - did what in turning round the Emergency between 1950-52. This is vital because what period and factors people attribute the turnaround to has a major impact on the ‘lessons’ extracted.

<sup>15</sup>TNA: Air20/10377, ‘Review of the Emergency’, DOO, 12 Sept. 1957.

## Lessons from the Malayan Emergency

The introduction noted that ‘lessons’ commonly drawn from the campaign can be distilled into four headings: (1) ‘population control’ and security; (2) ‘winning hearts and minds’; (3) command; and (4) ‘learning organisation’.<sup>16</sup>

Amongst the influential purveyors of such lessons were counterinsurgency practitioners from Malaya. Most notably, Sir Robert Thompson - wartime Chindit and latterly Permanent Secretary for Defence for Malaya - was despatched to head the British International Advisory Mission (BRIAM) to South Vietnam in 1961-65. He later claimed the Americans were failing because of poor application of the Malayan paradigm: they lacked effective unified control, and did not properly consolidate and protect resettlement areas (strategic hamlets). Thompson’s *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966) codified the approach he felt had won in Malaya. His five principles included: the government must have a clear political aim; function according to the law; have an overall plan; give priority to defeating political subversion; and secure its base areas first. Subsequent works, while accepting Thompson’s approach and producing similar lists, have tended to prioritise particular parts of his explanation for success.

In particular, some argued that, while population control brought the campaign to stalemate within 18 months of initiation in June 1950, by late 1951 something extra was still required. They cite the peak of indicators such as insurgent numbers and incidents in 1951, and repeated disappointments that it was not yielding greater results.<sup>17</sup> They also cite (absolutely rightly) the severe British sense of crisis at the year’s end, with Gurney’s assassination, Brigg’s retirement, inadequate police training, peak monthly security casualties in October 1951, and Malay alarm.<sup>18</sup> Finally, they argue (utterly wrongly this time) that policy was shifting for the worse in late 1951, including towards counter-productive ‘Sinophobia’ (in fact Gurney was intensifying cooperation with key Chinese leaders, albeit amongst heightened tension).<sup>19</sup> They therefore propose a ‘stalemate thesis’ for 1951. They suggest the assassination of Gurney on 6 October 1951 and retirement of his leadership team cleared the way for vital changes, without which things could not have improved. For them success was

<sup>16</sup> For a survey of the literature up to 1999, see Hack, ‘“Iron Claws on Malaya”’.

<sup>17</sup> Simon Smith, ‘General Templer and Counter-Insurgency in Malaya: Hearts and Minds, Intelligence, and Propaganda’, *Intelligence and National Security* 16, 3 (Autumn 2001), 64.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, ‘General Templer’, 64.

<sup>19</sup> The accusation that Gurney was shifting towards Sinophobia is the absolute reverse of the truth. Understanding how scholars could be so disastrously wrong highlights serious deficiencies in much modern COIN analysis. Anthony Short, *In Pursuit of the Mountain Rats: The Communist Insurrection in Malaya* (Singapore: Cultured Lotus 2000), 301-3, Smith, *General Templer*, 66. The ‘Sinophobic’ argument is wrong because the key 4 Oct. 1951 Gurney document supposedly showing Sinophobia ends with a call from Gurney for *increased MCA cooperation* in areas such as fund-raising (seldom has a document been more blatantly misinterpreted). Indeed, the argument can only be sustained because its proponents refuse to read the relevant Asian archives, or to engage seriously even with Chin Peng’s analysis of events. Hence MCA leader Tan Cheng Lock actually regarded Gurney as working closely with him – right up to his death - to improve MCA political efficacy. See Tan Cheng Lock papers at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore. November 1951 Federal Executive War Committee papers, from just after Gurney’s death, also show Gurney’s plans continued to be pursued, for instance they discussed planned increases in Chinese citizenship and more armed Chinese Home Guards. Tan told Lyttelton in Dec. 1951 that Gurney’s death was a great personal loss. ‘“Iron Claws”’, 110-12 (see 111 fn 43 for extended references to the Tan and MacDonald papers). Cab 128/C(51)26, 20 Nov. 1951, ‘The Situation in Malaya’, Annex 1, ... ‘The crux of the problem is winning the loyalty and confidence of the Chinese population’. Subsequent works such as Smith, ‘General Templer’ have failed to address the evidence to the contrary in, for instance, the Tan Cheng Lock papers. This shows the dangers of ‘Euro-’, ‘Western’ and ‘Colonial Record-centric’ approaches, which by failing, or refusing, to engage properly with well-known non-European and insurgent sources produce flawed analyses.



based on the addition in 1952 of ‘winning hearts and minds’ and/or the ‘energising’ and unifying leadership of Templer.<sup>20</sup>

‘Winning Hearts and Minds’ has proved a seductive term, appearing in titles such as Richard Stubb’s *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency 1948-1960* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), which stressed the progress of elections from late 1951, and the provision of amenities, economic opportunities and hope to New Villagers from 1952.

The leadership or Templer school meanwhile, has expositions ranging from a hagiographic 1954 study by C. Northcote Parkinson, through Anthony Short’s influential 1975, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya*,<sup>21</sup> to Simon Smith’s ‘General Templer and Counter-Insurgency in Malaya: Hearts and Minds, Intelligence, and Propaganda’. For these Templer ‘energised’ the campaign, and various measures already planned from late 1951 (such as increasing the arming of Chinese Home Guards) are credited to him personally.<sup>22</sup>

Most recently, United States officers have attempted to integrate the Malayan example into their post 9-11 re-examination of American counterinsurgency doctrine. There was a prior history of American studies of Malaya, with classics by sociologist Lucien Pye in 1956, and Riley Sunderland’s RAND funded, *Antiguerrilla intelligence in Malaya, 1948-1960* (Santa Monica, California: Rand, 1964).<sup>23</sup> But after the 1960s interest had waned, only to be spurred again by events in Afghanistan and Iraq.

John Nagl’s *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (London : University of Chicago Press, 2005.) took a novel approach. He focussed not on a particular method as differentiating Malaya and Vietnam, but process. He claimed the British army was, by 1952, a pragmatic ‘learning organisation’, with the flexibility to adapt doctrine in-theatre, according to changing contexts and best practice. The lesson was that Americans needed similarly effective ‘learning organisations’, as opposed to over-rigid central control of doctrine, and difficulties in encouraging and rapidly analysing and using feedback from battalion and platoon levels.

When the United States re-examined counterinsurgency doctrine in the light of Afghanistan and Iraq, it further echoed Nagl and ‘lessons’ previously derived from Malaya. FM3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (2006)<sup>24</sup> emphasised the need for security forces to become successful ‘learning organisations’, and listed characteristics of forces which had achieved this, namely: developing doctrine locally; establishing local training centres, promoting suggestions from the field and subordinates, establishing rapid avenues of disseminating lessons, and being open to advice from local people.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, its emphasis on insurgency as a battle for legitimacy could have been taken from Thompson or later ‘hearts and minds’ literature, with their stress on political concessions, and helping host nation governments gain legitimacy.

<sup>20</sup> This is ironic, since even the term ‘winning hearts and minds’, usually attributed to Templer’s period, was prefigured by Gurney’s 1951 Legislative Assembly statement that... ‘this war is not to be won only with guns or the ballot-box or any other material instrument which does not touch the hearts of men..’, *Straits Times Annual 1952* (Singapore: *Straits Times* 1952), preface.

<sup>21</sup> Hack, ‘“Iron claws”’, 100 fn 5. See also Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya* (London: Frederick Muller 1975). Reprinted as *In Pursuit of the Mountain Rats*.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, ‘General Templer’, 60-78. Kumar Ramakrishna, ‘“Transmogrifying” Malaya: the impact of Sir Gerald Templer (1952-1954)’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 32, 1 (2001), 79-92.

<sup>23</sup> Sunderland can now be supplemented by Leon Comber’s, *Malaya’s Secret Police 1945-60: The Role of the Special Branch in the Malayan Emergency* (Singapore: ISEAS 2008); Ramakrishna’s *Emergency Propaganda*; and Lucien Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya* (Princeton University Press 1956).

<sup>24</sup> David Petraeus and James A Amos, FM3-24/MCWP 3-33.5, *Counterinsurgency* (December 2006), accessed online on 12 June 2008 at URL: <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf>. Hereafter FM3-24.

<sup>25</sup> FM3-24, x.

But FM3-24 also replicates more tendentious interpretations. It includes as one of its vignettes the retraining of the Malayan police. Since this misconstrues the sequencing of events in Malaya, it is worth quoting at length:

By 1952, the insurgency had reached a stalemate. The British then established a new strategy. The strategy included reforming and retraining the entire Malaya Police Force. First, 10,000 corrupt or incompetent police officers were removed from the force. Then, police officers who had proven the most competent in operations were made instructors in new police schools. During 1952 and 1953, every police officer attended a four-month basic training course. Police commissioned and noncommissioned officers were sent to three- to four-month advanced courses. All senior Malayan police officers were required to attend the police intelligence school. There they learned the latest criminal investigation techniques. Teams of Britain's top police officers taught them intelligence collection and analysis methods as well. Dozens of the most promising Malayan officers attended the full yearlong course in advanced police operations in Britain.

To win the ethnic Chinese away from the insurgents, the British worked closely with ethnic Chinese organizations to recruit Chinese for the Malaya Police Force. In 1952, the number of ethnic Chinese in the force more than doubled ...

Thanks to their intelligence training, the security forces could develop intelligence from that information and act on it. They begin to break the insurgent organization. In 1953, the government gained the initiative. After that, the insurgent forces and support structure declined rapidly.

The Malaya insurgency provides lessons applicable to combating any insurgency. Manpower is not enough; well-trained and well-disciplined forces are required. The Malayan example also illustrates the central role that police play in counterinsurgency operations. British leaders concentrated on training the Malayan leadership. The British insisted that chosen personnel receive the full British Army and police officer courses.

The assumes there was 'stalemate' in 1952, and that what transformed things from 1953 was the correct training of Host Nation (HN) Forces. This is extrapolated into a general lesson on the central role of HN force training, prior to transferring control to them.

To a degree this is unexceptional, and almost tautologous. The more quickly HN forces can be given operational control the less legitimacy they will lose. The better-trained HN forces are, the better they are likely to perform. It is also true that Britain did indeed, after the counter-terror, minimise collateral damage, and work closely with communal organisations. Finally, it is true that from 1953 police retraining, and the establishment of a dedicated Special Branch training school, undoubtedly improved efficiency.

Yet the cause and effect sequence suggested for Malaya is wrong. It is not true that the police were retrained and as a consequence the Emergency turned. In the critical 1950-52 phase, Gurney and Briggs deferred adequate police training in favour of maximising the numerical expansion of HN forces, and achieving comprehensive resettlement in the fastest possible time. This was despite the Commissioner of Police's pleas for a slow-down, as his force neared breaking point.<sup>26</sup> Phased police retraining only began from mid-1952, and 'Operation Service' in December 1952. What these meant was that gains made possible once improved security had been provided could later be optimised.

FM3-24's 'lessons' from Malaya are not so much deduced by analysis of the Emergency, as projected backwards onto it in order to justify preferred contemporary policies. For all its merits, FM-24's use of the police vignette is a good illustration of the present-led abuse of past case-studies.

## **New sources and the real Malayan Emergency**

<sup>26</sup> Short, *In Pursuit of the Mountain Rats*, 288.

FM3-24's confusion of Emergency causation reinforces the need to get the sequence of cause and effect right before deriving 'lessons'. Fortunately, new documentation has emerged since 1989, including new evidence from the communist side, notably from the long serving Secretary General of the Malayan Communist Party, Chin Peng (Secretary General, 1947-).<sup>27</sup>

What was the MCP interpretation? Remember, much of the literature maintains there was a 1951 stalemate. This was put to Chin Peng by counterinsurgency practitioners and analysts at a meeting at the Australian National University, Canberra, in February 1999. John Coates asked Chin Peng 'what was the high point...?' Chin Peng replied '1949-50', based on two phases: early 1949, when there were plans for full scale attack and liberating a part of Kelantan State,<sup>28</sup> and 1949-50 with a new plan for smallscale but widespread attacks and sabotage. This was not the required answer. Anthony Short suggested that 'Maybe after the death of Gurney' was a moment when there might have seemed a possibility of success. C.F. Yong and Short later restated the question.<sup>29</sup> Asked by Short to 'confirm or deny' that 1951 and Gurney's assassination was a high point, Chin Peng said 'We didn't'. So Chin Peng was three times prompted to say 1951 was the high point, and in addition that resettlement was not such a challenge because New Villages could be penetrated. He firmly disagreed, especially with the first point, steering the audience back to his own narrative. This was that the most hopeful periods were 1949-50. For him, 1951-52 saw increasing constraints due to resettlement, and the October 1951 Resolutions in response. In his later memoirs Chin Peng added that 'I first heard of Templer's appointment over Radio Malaya. By then we were really feeling the heat of the new villages'.<sup>30</sup>

Chin Peng described the MNLA always struggling to secure adequate supplies for larger units, with difficulties increasing as the Briggs Plan consolidated. He told how the Central Committee repeatedly failed to establish a durable headquarters base in 1952-53, because it could not find an area both safe and able to feed a large contingent. As he put it, 'our people at that time, we had, .. a whole haversack of money ... but we can't get a bit of food'.<sup>31</sup> In 1952-54 the Central Committee began a series of shifts northward, until it ended up in 1954 on the Malayan-Thai border.<sup>32</sup>

Chin Peng helps make sense of the October 1951 Resolutions and accompanying orders. These run to 60 pages (in the MCP's English-language version). They followed a re-evaluation in the light of resettlement, and of MCP experience in Kedah with smaller, platoon level operations.<sup>33</sup> They called for a diversion of some insurgents into armed work parties (AWPs) to support the *Min Yuen*, greater selectivity in targeting, break-up into smaller groups, establishment of jungle farms, and an increase in political and subversive activities in towns. They also emphasised a move to more selective sabotage, and more restrained punishment of 'running dogs' to consolidate popular support.

The emphasis was – Chin Peng notes in his 'memoirs' - on making insurgency sustainable for a long period at a lower level of activity, while building up political support. As we noted above, the political and military aspects were intertwined.<sup>34</sup> Yes, the political language was

<sup>27</sup> Chin Peng, *Alias Chin Peng: My Side of the Story* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2003), henceforth *Alias Chin Peng Dialogues*, where 392-4 lists new Chinese works, which continue to proliferate, eg Fong Chong Pi, *Fong Chong Pik* (Petaling Jaya: SIRD 2008).

<sup>28</sup> *Dialogues*, 144.

<sup>29</sup> *Dialogues*, 150, 155-6, 159-60.

<sup>30</sup> *Alias Chin Peng*, 295.

<sup>31</sup> *Dialogues*, 162.

<sup>32</sup> *Alias Chin Peng*, 323-9.

<sup>33</sup> TNA: CO1022/187, 62-158, enclosed with High Commissioner (Malaya) to Colonial Secretary (from JP Morton, Director of Intelligence), 31 Dec. 1952.

<sup>34</sup> Short, *In Pursuit of the Mountain Rats*, 321, and Smith, 'General Templer', ignore the CIS, Chin Peng and others in continuing to argue that the military parts of the directives were 'derivative'.

that of correcting 'left deviationism' which had pushed the masses too far too fast, and not courted enough of a united front with those below the wealthiest bourgeoisie. But those conclusions derived from increasing problems with sustaining mass support.

Chin Peng argues that 'there was no question that these orders had to be obeyed', so the directives drove the reduction in incidents in 1952.<sup>35</sup> He argues the British avoided publicity for the Resolutions until the London *Times* revealed them, to Templer's fury, on 30 November 1952. Public knowledge, he suggests, would have undermined the case for tight controls, and have been inconvenient when the authorities had just relabelled MNLA from 'communist bandits' to 'CTs': communist terrorists. The 'Functional Directive of the Central Politbureau on Carrying Out Party's Tasks' had ordered an end to the burning of 'concentration camps', attacks on post offices, transport and utilities, and slashing rubber trees. Of seven orders, 'Directive 4 on Clearing and Planting, and 5, 'Material Supplies' also touched on supply issues. However flawed resettlement was, with some areas having inadequate wiring and lighting in 1951, and food transferred by workers when outside the wire, the MCP judged its supply and intelligence links were deteriorating as a result.<sup>36</sup> Hence the orders to transfer personnel to deep jungle planting, to stockpiling of food, break into smaller fighting units, and to increase *orang asli* cooperation.

What Chin Peng says now, key British authorities were saying then. British intelligence and police documents from 1952 state that the orders were being implemented in varying degrees in the months to September 1952. Units close to the Central Committee would have responded quickly, the rest in a cascade, as orders filtered through the jungle courier system, with the closest responding almost immediately, and the last as late as a year later.<sup>37</sup> Since most State Committees received the orders by around May 1952, they would have had their main cumulative impact from May to October 1952 if not longer. This is precisely when uneven improvements in emergency statistics became dramatic.<sup>38</sup> It is true that figures for 1952-54 as a whole look impressive too, as Smith and others argue, but to cite them in order to suggest the main changes come from after 1952 is demonstrably wrong.<sup>39</sup> The fastest pace of change in most categories in the overall campaign occurred during May to October 1952, as Figure 4 below shows.

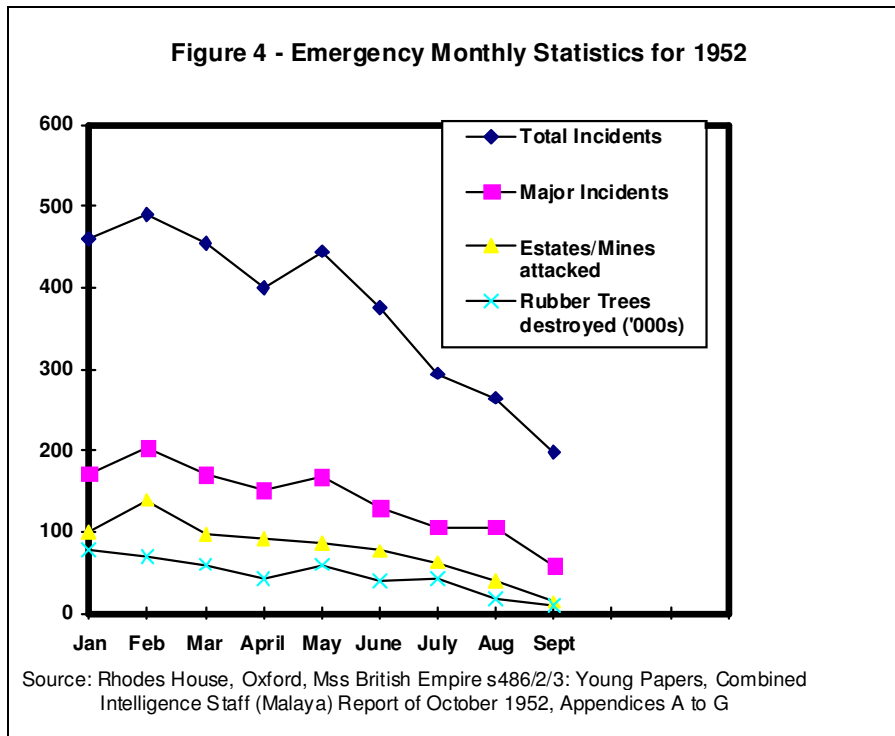
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<sup>36</sup> Karl Hack, 'British Intelligence and Counter-insurgency in the era of decolonisation: The Example of Malaya, *Intelligence and National Security* 14, 2 (1999), 134-45.

<sup>37</sup> Smith argues the orders cannot have driven 1952 statistics, since they would take a year to reach units. But see Rhodes House, Young Papers, reports on the Malayan Emergency, 1952-53. State Committees had the documents by May 1952, and they were being acted upon. The assumption was that it would take a year *to reach all, that is the last, units*. See also Hack, 'British Intelligence and Counter-insurgency', 137-8.

<sup>38</sup> Rhodes House, Young Papers, 'Notes for the Commissioner of Police Lecture: Review of the Security Situation in Malaya'.

<sup>39</sup> See Smith, 'General Templer', 60-78. Smith cites a statistical blip (Feb-March 1952 figures, see 65), but ignores the trend. The blip was partly attributed to the ending of floods and anniversaries. TNA: 1022/14.



It would be possible to argue the MCP's October 1951 orders were an 'own goal' which eased pressure and allowed security forces to retrain. It is possible that the orders were forced on the MNLA by the Briggs Plan. But it is implausible to suggest they were not a major driver of change in 1952. The number of rubber trees slashed, for instance, collapsed from up to 70,000 to less than a 1,000 a month.

Despite the traditional Emergency historiography ignoring the scale of the 1952 turnaround, the above view is not novel. It is taken not just from Chin Peng, but also from 1952 documents of the Federation police, and the DOO's Combined Intelligence Staff. One early 1953 briefing for the Commissioner of Police stated that:

'It is considered that as a consequence of the transfer of personnel to Armed Work Forces and Cultivation Units, the overall M.R.L.A [MNLA] strength will have been reduced by about 1,600. However, the plan to raise new Platoons to offset withdrawals into selected deep jungle bases would result in a net reduction of about 1,500....The reduction of military activity, the partial withdrawal to the jungle, and pressure by Government are having some effect on M.C.P morale'.<sup>40</sup>

Bearing in mind average insurgent strength for 1951 was 7292, and for 1951 was 5765, this was a major realignment.<sup>41</sup> The Armed Work Forces, of 10-15 each, were to mix *Min Yuen* and transferred insurgents. They were to establish cultivation plots, organise aborigines, stockpile food, participate in illegal activities, and help protect the *Min Yuen*. There was to be preparation in 1952 for withdrawals of some units to deep jungle bases by late 1952. The October Resolutions meant ongoing structural changes, which would alter the nature of the Emergency in a cumulative fashion over 18 months to two years.

The main government assessment of these changes was CIS (52) (7) Final, 'Review of the Security Situation in Malaya as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 1952', by the Combined Intelligence

<sup>40</sup> Rhodes House, Mss British Empire s486/2/1, Misc., p. 53, paras 33-35, 'Short History of the Emergency', by Operations Branch, Federal Police Headquarters, 21 Oct. 1952, paras 33-34; and (F), 'Aim and Strategy of the MCP'. Filed in the Young Papers for 1952-53 as lecture notes.

<sup>41</sup> TNA, Air20/13077, 'Review of Emergency Operations', Director of Operations, September 1957. Subsequent figures were 1953 (4373), 1954 (3402), 1955 (2798), 1956 (2231).

Staff.<sup>42</sup> Dated October 1952, this talked of the ‘vast improvement in Malaya during the last six months’. It noted the ‘steady decrease in terrorist inspired incidents’ since February, from an average monthly figure of 506 a month in 1951, to 295 in July 1952, and 198 in September. For some categories, the change had come earlier: attacks on public transport more than halved in February alone. Security force casualties had slumped, though civilian casualties declined more erratically.

In the report’s words, ‘To sum up, the terrorists have reduced their overt activity to a remarkable degree ... On the other hand, they have suffered higher casualties’. It attributed the change to the October orders, in turn attributed to the Briggs Plan, writing that: ‘The resettlement of 450,000 Chinese with the accompanying Food Control Regulations disrupted the then existent M.C.P organisation for the supply of food and intelligence ... These administrative measures, supported by a framework of Army and Police designed to maintain coverage of the maximum area, robbed the M.C.P of the initiative. During the 18 months April 1950 to September 1951 when the effect of these measures was becoming felt, the M.C.P suffered a steadily increasing casualty rate. The situation clearly called for a drastic revision of tactics.’ It saw the communist changes as causing the statistical changes, and as ‘forced on the Party by Government measures .. What is now being witnessed is in fact an attempt by the M.C.P to retrieve a steadily worsening situation and to create conditions which by mass subversion will result in a greater degree of popular support. Thereafter, the Party will be able to renew the military offensive with increased weight’.

The explanation given in the Government of Malaya annual report was similar:

‘Evidence from captured documents corroborated that measures to control food seriously disrupted the terrorist food supply system. These measures, coupled with the Security Forces success in finding a large number of reserve food dumps, caused no little concern to the Malayan Communist Party leaders and forced the merging of their armed units and supply organisation into small mobile....<sup>43</sup>

The MCP was so alarmed at the fall-off of activity that in late 1952 it issued orders to increase attacks. But too late. An MNL force in the middle of restructuring, faced by improvements in resettlement area security, was not capable of reversing the tide.

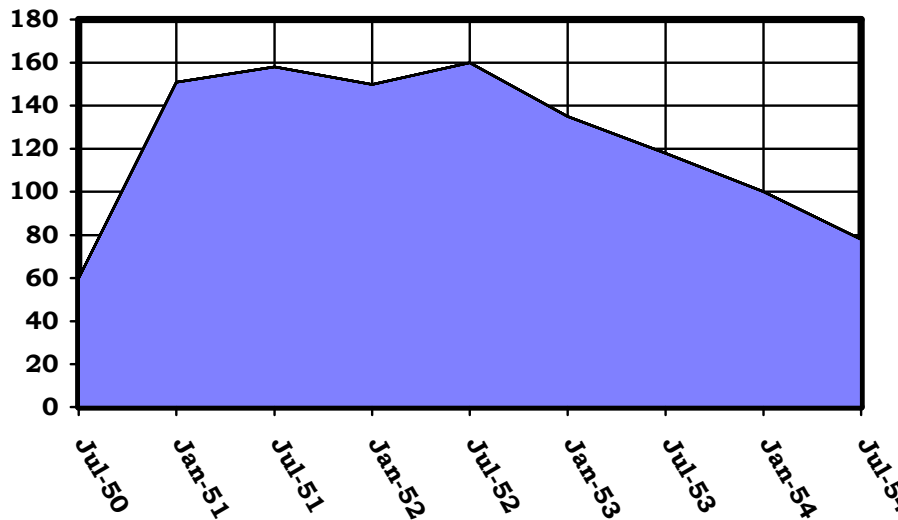
In short, a range sources indicate tentative improvement in limited areas in 1951, followed by a swing in most indicators in 1952. Smith’s recent claim that ‘without Templer, the government would have ... simply ground to a standstill in 1952’ is a reflection not of the evidence – indeed it seems to refuse to engage with either Chin Peng or British intelligence analyses of the time - but of an entrenched British narrative which has led to cognitive failure. This inability to see contrary evidence has distorted the history of the Emergency, and the lessons taken from it.

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<sup>42</sup> Rhodes House, Young Papers, CIS (52) (7) (Final), ‘Review of the Security Situation as at 30 September 1952’, 10 October 1952.

<sup>43</sup> *Annual Report on the Federation of Malaya: 1951* (Kuala Lumpur: Federal Printers 1952).

**Figure 5: Emergency Contacts - Monthly rates calculated as averages for 6-month periods, and plotted at the mid-point**



Source: Air20/10377, DOO Report, 1957, Appendix A

Just as importantly, by late 1951-52 resettlement was creating an environment in which insurgents had to come into the vicinity of controlled areas for supplies, intelligence and political work. Government could monitor food and detect who was obtaining larger amounts to leave near the wire or smuggle out, as a prelude to turning MNLAs suppliers. All this combined to ensure that despite October 1951 orders reducing insurgent attacks, security force-initiated contacts held up in 1952. In addition after reaching a low of 2.5 in 1950 the insurgent:security force elimination ratio climbed to 3 in 1951, 6 in 1952, and 15 in 1953.<sup>44</sup>

Where Templer played a major role was thus not in securing a turning point, but in ensuring maximum efficiency in the late 1952 to 1960 'optimisation' phase. Again, historians who turn the matter into pro- or anti-Templer over-personalise. The question is not whether Templer was effective, harsh, or politically astute (he was all of these), nor whether he was an effective leader who transformed efficiency (he was) but precisely what he achieved, and when.

The answer is that his main contribution was to optimising the advantage taken of the turnaround.<sup>45</sup> Prior to his arrival, for instance, Special Branch had been expanding fast – including its numbers of Chinese officers - and improving efficiency. But he separated it from the Criminal Investigation Department, and allowed a separate Special Branch Training School. As forces experimented with permutations of intelligence-food-military operations around now consolidating New Villages, Templer helped build an efficient system for the collection, analysis, and dissemination (CAD) of best-practice techniques. Special Branch and other officers cycled through SB school for short courses. Army unit experiences were collated.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> See John Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency: An Analysis of the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1955* (Boulder: Westview 1992), 76 (note 76), for MCP strength; 190-202, for monthly figures; 202 for the ratio.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, 'General Templer', tries to resurrect the debate as pro or anti Templer, but this is a 1950s squabble of little contemporary interest. Ironically, at the same time the CIS were privately ascribing 1952 changes to the Oct. 1951 Resolutions, London was telling commanders elsewhere it was due to Templer's energy and drive, consigning the MCP policy changes to tenth out of ten factors. In a sense, most historians have bought the government propaganda line of 1952. See TNA: WO216/561.

<sup>46</sup> For intelligence improvements see Hack, 'British Intelligence and Counterinsurgency in Malaya', *Intelligence and National Security*, 14, 2 (1999), 129-33. Page 131 enumerates Templer's role. For amnesties see TNA: CO1022/27.

Military Intelligence Officers (MIOs) were posted with SB to help 'translate' police and Special Branch intelligence into a form useful to the military. The locally based Jungle Training School helped ensure experience was passed on. At numerous levels, the CAD system was fine-tuned. Templer instigated a Combined Emergency Planning Staff he could despatch as his eyes and ears, and an Operational Research Team which was fed patrol report forms.<sup>47</sup> Templer had all this codified in the 1954 'Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya (ATOM). This and subsequent ATOMs were milestones in the development of British counterinsurgency. Whereas in the Malayan campaign in 1948-49 old lessons had had to be learned afresh in the field, in future such lessons would be more accessible.

Templer's background, as a former Director of Intelligence in London, and position as supremo, allowed him to create a better 'learning organisation'. The techniques refined included the classic New Village-based operations described by Clutterbuck's books. A group of villages would be selected to correspond to a MNLA or MCP committee area. Hard supporters would be detained, so the MCP had to rely on vulnerable supporters. The latter would be compromised and turned into agents. Food operations would then intensify, for instance with central cooking of rice, punctured tins, and patrols increased, to make the insurgent need for supplies extreme. Then weak spots would be created as 'honeypots'. Security forces, warned of insurgent use of the latter by their new live intelligence, could ambush insurgents, or capture and turn yet more of them. Combined with targeted propaganda, and better amnesty terms, sometimes large numbers of surrenders were attained as operations unfolded, especially in 1955-58.<sup>48</sup>

What I am suggesting is not that Templer failed to bring new skills, but rather a new periodisation, which implies slightly different lessons. It involves three main periods, namely:

1. Counter terror and sweep (1948-49).
2. Clear and Hold, characterised by population control of the Briggs Plan, persuading minds, and a massive concentration of resource (1950-52).
3. Optimisation, characterised by winning hearts as well as minds, finessing of operations, and becoming an efficient 'learning organisation' (mid to late 1952-60).

The periods showed some overlap, for instance Britain remained sensitive to the need to court Malay opinion, and the MCA, throughout. Courting key elites and sectional groups was a foundation stone. But 'winning hearts' of lower classes only became a major focus in phase 3, as resources could be freed, and increased security meant improvements would be sabotaged less often. Measures then included police retraining and 'Operation Service' (from December 1952), the declaration of 'white areas' (1953) where restrictions were removed to reward improvements, and an intensified provision of amenities in New Villages.

### **Persuading Minds then Winning Hearts**

The above analysis raises the question: what role did 'winning hearts and minds' play in the key 'Clear and Hold' phase? We have noted that certain political measures continued throughout, for instance the introduction of municipal elections in December 1951 and February 1952. The latter saw the birth of an 'alliance' between UMNO and MCA, which was to form the post-independence government. So British political concessions, and a narrative about increasing self-government, undoubtedly helped keep onside the Malay elite and also Chinese MCA leaders who held positions in businesses, and clan and other

<sup>47</sup> Nagl, *Eating Soup with a Knife*, 96.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War: The Malayan Emergency 1948-1960* (London: Cassell 1966), and Karl Hack, 'Corpses, POWs and Captured documents: British and Communist Narratives of the Malayan Emergency', *Intelligence and National Security* 14, 4 (1999), 216, 228-9.



traditional associations.<sup>49</sup> But the experiences of rural Chinese, who moved in Mandarin and dialect speaking worlds – Hokkien, Teochiu, Hakka and more – were rather different.

Kumar Ramakrishna's *Emergency Propaganda: The Winning of Malayan Hearts and Minds, 1948-1958* correctly identifies the critical battle as for these rural Chinese, and the importance of gaining 'confidence' by matching 'propaganda of deed' to 'propaganda of word'. But it gives only a modest amount of concrete illustration of what propaganda to the rural Chinese was in 1950-52.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, in claiming Templer increased confidence by energising the campaign from 1952 – he 'remoralised' it – Ramakrishna ascribes increasing confidence to one overriding factor.<sup>51</sup> Yet we have established that incidents and deaths would fall dramatically in 1952 almost regardless of British actions. It is difficult to see how this could have failed to 'energise' security forces by releasing effort for other activities, or to increase security for some rural Chinese.<sup>52</sup>

All of which leads us to ask what propaganda was saying in 1950-52. For key groups – resettled Chinese, and insurgents – it was about persuading minds more than winning hearts. This is hardly surprising. Resettlement areas were still rudimentary, many of their occupants had relatives in the jungle, and vegetable production disrupted by the move only recovered from 1953.<sup>53</sup> Restrictions increased when there were operations, making these inopportune times to stress the benefits of resettlement. Though many villages greatly improved by 1954, as late as 1956 a DOO could say that, in one area, 'in spite of the sullenly hostile population, we are making very good military progress by screwing down the people in the strongest and sternest manner.'<sup>54</sup>

What were leaflets saying in 1951-53?<sup>55</sup> Leaflet 1434 (3 December 1952, for Chinese CTs): warned that 'You are in a virtually hopeless position. More people are daily refusing to support you... There is no decent burial for such futile death in the jungle'. Leaflet 1579 (17 February 1953: for Tamils) that 'This Indian was Ramasamy ... asked to be allowed to leave the jungle and return to India ... Shots were fired and people shuddered ... He was shot dead like an unwanted dog'. These are similar to earlier leaflets featuring dead communists. Messages tended to stress the futility of life in the jungle, and the likelihood that helping insurgents would lead to loss or death.

Rewards were also increased from 1950, not only for civilians, but also for insurgents who brought in weapons or comrades. Thousands of 'Safe Conduct' passes were dropped, sometimes including a promise of a reward for members of the public who helped any 'CT' with a pass. One such safe conduct pass contained a picture of three uniformed security force

<sup>49</sup> This fits the argument of Smith, *The Utility of Force*, that commanders are like script writers, seeking to win people over to their narrative in a battle 'amongst the people'.

<sup>50</sup> Lim Hin Fui, *Poverty Among Chinese in Malaysia: with special reference to three new villages in Perak* (Unpublished thesis: Universiti of Malaysia 1990), 119, and fn 22 at 149. Few villagers turned out to see Templer in Palawan in 1952, for fear of the MCP, and few took up temporary occupation licenses in 1953 for the same reason. The headman had to persuade an angry Templer – who accused them of being 'communists' – not to have the village moved. Lim's picture is of poverty, threats from both sides, and voting for the MCA in the hope they could help.

<sup>51</sup> See also Ramakrishna, '“Transmogrifying” Malaya', 91-2.

<sup>52</sup> Kumar Ramakrishna, *Emergency Propaganda: The Winning of Hearts and Minds, 1948-1958* (Richmond: Curzon 2002), especially chapter 5, 'Propaganda Turning Point, Templer, February 1952-May 1954', 120-59.

<sup>53</sup> Ray Nyce, 'Chinese New Villages in Malaya' (Conn.: D.Phil published by Hartford Seminary Foundation 1963), xxxvi.-xxxvii.

<sup>54</sup> TNA: WO216/901, DOO (Malaya) to Templer, 15 March 1956.

<sup>55</sup> The leaflets discussed here are mostly from Kings College London, Liddel Hart Military Archives, Stockwell papers 7/6. Several of those discussed here can be viewed in *Dialogues*, pp. 211-16. At the time of writing, further specimens were also available online at sites such as that of the National Malaya and Borneo Veterans' Association, UK (URL: <http://www.nmbva.co.uk/>, last accessed 24 April 2009); and at SGM (retired) Herbert A. Friedman, 'Psychological Warfare of the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960', consulted at URL: <http://www.psywar.org/malaya.php>, last accessed on 24 April 2009.

personnel throwing a life belt to a drowning insurgent. It contained, in seven languages and with Chinese most prominent, the words 'SAFE CONDUCT PASS. Treat bearer well, give food and medical attention. Report to Military or Police Officer'.<sup>56</sup>

Figures 6 and 7: Propaganda Leaflet 1534 of January 1953.

Credit: By permission of the Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London.

[Please print main image **at full page size if at all possible**]

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<sup>56</sup> See this leaflet in *Dialogues*, 213.

晤使問亞貴

## 馬共匪徒 害得我們真慘!



匪徒要求我幫忙。  
他們要糧食。  
他們要布疋，要鞋子。  
又要金錢。  
他們要藥品。  
他們要我用種種的詭計運交這些物品給他們

### 我何必要幫忙他們呢？

他們在山芭裏活動了四年有多，並沒有任何成就，同時對我們完全沒有利益

### 會有什麼結果呢？

假如我幫助馬共匪徒，會有什麼結果呢？結果就是遲早警察就會查出這件事，把我捉去拘留起來，或者甚至押送出境回國。如果在這種情形之下，我為着要逃避警察逮捕而逃入山芭加入馬共的話，那麼遲早我就會被馬共利用來當炮灰！

就算在很少有的情況之下，警察沒有查出我曾經協助共匪，如果當地有一二名共匪在運糧或收捐時被保安隊伍擊斃時，其他的共匪就會懷疑是我出賣他們洩漏秘密向當局通水，於是這些共匪就會把我們打死了！

所以任何和共匪發生關係的行動的結果都是祇有死路一條。

### 我要怎樣做呢？

我要把我的生命和家庭的安全孤注一擲嗎？

譬如匪徒強迫我去協助他們，這又怎辦？

我已經立下心，我決不自動去協助匪徒。——如果我在脅迫下去協助他們，過後我必將經過情形報告政府，因為政府曾經明白的宣佈過，政府將不會懲罰我的，事實上，如果我將經過情形報告政府之後，他們且將我的姓名保守秘密，此外，我或可會獲得賞金哩。

晤使問亞貴

Leaflet No: 1534

Languages: Chinese, Tamil

T R A N S L A T I O N

I DON'T HAVE TO ASK.  
THE ANSWER IS OBVIOUS

CARTOON  
What a lot of  
suffering the  
bandits are  
causing us.

The Bandits come to me for help.  
They want food.  
They want cloth and shoes & money.  
They want medicine.

They want me to be up to all sorts of  
strange tricks to take these things to  
them.

WHY SHOULD I HELP THEM?

They have been in the jungle for over  
four years and have achieved nothing,  
and they have not benefitted me at all.

WHAT COULD HAPPEN?

What could happen to me if I help the MCP bandits?  
Sooner or later the Police will find out and will arrest me.  
I may be sent to detention or even banished to China! If I were to  
run into the jungle to join the communists in order to avoid arrest  
under such circumstances, sooner or later I would be made use of by  
the MCP for their cannon-fodder!

If the Police do not find out that I have helped the bandits,  
which is most unlikely, and one or two bandits are shot dead by the  
Security Forces while collecting food or subscriptions, then I shall  
be suspected by the other communist bandits for betrayal and be  
killed by them.

So any action in helping bandits will lead to only one  
end-----death.

WHAT SHALL I DO?

Should I risk my life and family?

Suppose they force me to help them?

I have made up my mind I will not help them voluntarily. - If they  
force me by threats then I will help them but I shall report the  
facts to Government. - The Government has clearly stated that they  
will not take any action against me - in fact they will keep my  
name secret and they may even reward me.

(CARTOON ON REVERSE SIDE)

Order No. 24/53

Date: 22.1.53.

The message in another leaflet, from around 1952-53, was 'Don't feed the communists, mad dogs: they will bite you'. It depicted a shorts-clad villager dropping his rice-bowl and grimacing in pain as a 'communist' – depicted as a fierce dog wearing a cap with a communist star on it – bites him.<sup>57</sup> Another tactic was to highlight 'terrorism', often meaning punishment of 'running dogs'. Leaflet 1489 (11 Dec. 1952, for Chinese) announced the death of Ah Kow Chai that 'This notorious bandit deserved to die', after 'chopping off three fingers of an Indian rubber tapper and stabbing the face and eyes of a Chinese rubber tapper'. It appealed for help finding two of his comrades, with rewards of up to \$6,500 for information leading to capture alive, \$5,000 if dead, concluding, 'Once these terrorists are removed, you will find peace in your area'. The leitmotif was 'Help yourself by helping the Government'. In a move that prefigured confidential telephone hotlines advertised on the side of Northern Ireland security force vans, you could send information to 'Post Box 5000'.<sup>58</sup>

There were many nuances, for instance radio broadcasts by ex-insurgents describing their first Chinese New Year outside of the jungle, with roast duck to eat and family around.<sup>59</sup> The

<sup>57</sup> See this image in Chin and Hack, *Dialogues*, 216.

<sup>58</sup> See also Rhodes House Oxford, Young Papers, 'Surrender of Communist Terrorists', 1953, which lists the main factors for increased surrenders as 1. better police and Special Branch intelligence, including confidence due to Operation Service 2. better security force-civil department cooperation, 3. effective food control helping to break CT morale, 4. informing people of the truth and 5. communist 'crimes' and brutality.

<sup>59</sup> Rhodes House, Young Papers, Radio Malaya transcript of 14 Feb. 1953 broadcast.

pill was also sugared, for instance mobile film units interspersing propaganda pieces with Tarzan films.<sup>60</sup>

So the emphasis for Chinese in 1952 varied from by group. Middle class Chinese were wooed with propaganda about progress to self-government and a 'Malayan' society, but for rural Chinese there was an emphasis on persuasion in the context of protective, coercive and enabling population control. For more hardline insurgents, persuasion included use of former comrades, overtly or as 'stool pigeons', and arguing with them in communist terms.

Yet again, 'lessons' derived from the campaign do not always mesh with what was happening at specific times. Hence the emphasis in 1951-53 propaganda appears to be both on 'winning hearts' of some, and yet on 'persuading' and coercing reluctant minds for others. It was in the optimisation period of that propaganda aimed at New Villagers emphasised a more positive slant. A key example is the introduction of 'white areas' from 1953, whereby residents were rewarded with the removal of Emergency restrictions in recognition of low levels of MNL activity. Another was the development of 'Good Citizens' Committees', who organised anti-communist and pro-community actions.

### **Conclusions**

This paper started by suggesting that four broad sets of 'lessons' have been derived from Malaya, namely: (1) the need for 'population control'; (2) the primacy of 'winning hearts and minds' (3) the role of unified and dynamic leadership; and (4) the need for effective 'learning organisations'.

It suggested that various commentators have accepted (1), population control, as enough to attain stalemate, but not to win. They have stressed the addition of (2) winning 'hearts and minds', and/or (3) command improvements, in the form of General Templer's impact.

We have argued that this balance of 'lessons' is based on a misreading of the evidence. The 'real Emergency' had population and spatial control more at its core. With more than 15 per cent of the population relocated in 18 months the MCP felt obliged to change its policy and force disposition from October 1951. Though British decision-makers also experienced a severe crisis, British policies proceeded more cumulatively. Hence my periodisation, of: 1. Counter terror and sweep (1948-49); 2. Clear and Hold characterised by population control, persuading minds, and massive concentration of resources, along with the declaratory aim of self-government (1950-52); and 3. Optimisation, characterised by winning hearts as well as minds, faster progress to independence, finessing operations, and becoming an efficient 'learning organisation' (late 1952-60).

Different phases required different policies: any counterinsurgency model that ignores this is likely to cause serious problems for at least some stages. Hence it is important to note the characteristics of the different phases in Malaya. There the first phase was characterised by low intelligence, and necessarily required fairly generic actions – sweeps, area punishments, largescale arrests – to break up insurgent units and begin to build the foundations for effective intelligence. The decisions on both sides which resulted in the back of the Emergency as high level campaign being broken came in the second period, and emphasised population control. The changes which allowed Britain to maximise the advantage from this matured in the third period, with Templer playing a major role. In particular, he helped to create an efficient Collect-Analyse-Disseminate system and 'learning organisation'. With all this in mind, a differently nuanced list of 'lessons' or 'reasons' for success can be suggested.

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<sup>60</sup> TNA: KV4/408.

1) Population and spatial control and security as the foundation stone for much of 2-6 below. The methods for attaining these in Malaya's rural areas relied heavily on resettlement. In urban situations where resettlement may be impractical, it might mean creating physical barriers, area guard posts, or dense patrolling of trouble-spots. This may necessitate enlistment of key sectors of the local population in various auxiliary roles in very large numbers, with high risks and low training in the initial stages. In modern conditions it might also imply high technology surveillance. In Malaya, the New Villages as fields for information gathering provided intelligence, and a space where local populations could enjoy amenities in relative safety, and interact with the administration so as to provide 'everyday' opportunities to provide information. The key was to hold, occupy and administer the space intensively, further intensifying control during operations. This physical space was hotly contested by insurgents and their underground workers, but on terms which increasingly favoured the security forces.

2) Persuading minds and winning hearts through the linked application of threat and inducement, minimum force, political concessions to potentially supportive groups, and social provision. Propaganda was of word and deed (good treatment of prisoners, remission for cooperation, rewards for information, amenities in New Villages). Here 'winning hearts and minds' can be misleading. British propaganda and political and civic action was differentiated by target group and operational phase. For two key groups, 'fence-sitting' New Villagers and 'soft' insurgent supporters, the accent in the 1950-52 period was on persuading minds where hearts were ambivalent if not bitterly alienated. Propaganda for hard core communists was different. It stressed talking to them in their own, communist language, often using surrendered insurgents. 'Winning hearts' through improved elections, amenities and positive security force behaviour could only be made significantly more effective after (1) had improved security and allowed minds to be shaped into compliance. Building facilities without adequate area control can actually undermine government, since damage to facilities and personnel is almost guaranteed. Hence the more positive side became more central in the optimisation phase.

(3) Command, the role of unified and dynamic leadership. In Malaya two major advances were made, both by taking advantage of a crisis. One of the additional 'lessons' of the Malayan situation is therefore that only crises tend to provide enough impetus to overcome institutional barriers. If you miss these, or attempt to downplay them, you may never achieve viable command structures and policies. The first of these crises was used to facilitate the creation of the post of DOO, integrated committee system, and 'Briggs Plan' in 1950. The second facilitated the appointment was of Templer as DOO and High Commissioner in 1952-54, and allowed him to optimise the campaign.

(4) Learning - the need for security forces to become effective 'learning organisations', providing structures for the filtering of operational information upwards from platoon level, and rapid analysis and circulation of best practice. In Malaya this strongly centred on SB training school, and the accumulation of army best practice in successive editions of ATOM. This is the post-1952 CAD (collect, analyse, disseminate) model that Templer built.

(5) Coopting and collaborating, the need to enlist large numbers of the population as political allies, and in auxiliary organisations. In Malaya this meant partial retreat from a more abstract ideal of democratic, issue-driven politics, to 'collaborating' with key communally-based groups such as UMNO, and the MCA's Chinese business elite. The latter helped filter detainees, and through their Alliance with UMNO provided a platform for multicomunal political representation from February 1952. One Emergency 'lesson' was that counterinsurgency involves tough political compromises to create conditions in which particular local leaders and communities are willing to risk their lives in order to organise resistance.

(6) Calibration, the matching of operations to insurgent organisation in terms of its committees and their areas. For instance new food denial-security operations were eventually focussed around a cluster of New Villages related to an MCP or MNLA committee area.

Many of these approaches would be used again, as far apart as Borneo and Northern Ireland. In particular, much of the Malayan model would be applied in Kenya – mass detention in camps, resettlement, divide and rule recruitment of groups opposed to the Mau Mau, and more – but with more brutality and less care about ‘winning hearts’. In Northern Ireland population control would be attempted by physical barriers, surveillance and intense patrolling of key areas, in a situation where massive relocation was not politically possible.

The variation in Britain’s counterinsurgencies thus ensured that the same menu of techniques could not be replicated in modular fashion. It was a question of whether certain principles or ingredients, such as creating population control and security, could be adapted to new conditions. In addition, different phases continued to dictate different types of response. It is naïve to think that the blend of policies found at the optimisation phase of successful insurgencies will work well at the outset of a conflict. Hence, though measures to win ‘hearts and minds’ have their place in all phases, if only to dampen the effects of collateral damage and hatred of the security forces, in Malaya the emphasis in the critical 1950-52 phase was on getting effective command, small unit patrols bolted onto areas, and population control and security.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, that centrality of spatial or population control as a platform for further ‘persuading minds’, and making local elites more proactively supportive and local auxiliaries more numerous and effective, is the central ‘lesson’ of Malaya, in so far as such ‘lessons’ are transferable.

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<sup>61</sup> Any attempt to contrast ‘coercive’ versus ‘winning hearts and minds’ approaches tends towards naïve simplification. In Malaya the various approaches were all present in each phase: but their emphasis and inter-relationship in the overall matrix changed to suit changing circumstances.

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