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Racial Politics of Colonial Governance in Countering Insurgency: Investigating Coethnic Recruitment during British Campaigns in Malaya and Cyprus 🔓

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Abstract

This article shows that colonial states strategically manipulated the recruitment and placement of their indigenous and imperial security forces in response to domestic constraints and threats arising from specific insurgencies. These recruitment decisions changed over relatively short spans of time and eventually determined conflict outcomes. To this end, the article compares the patterns of coethnic recruitment in counterinsurgency forces in two colonies—Malaya and Cyprus—within the same administrative setup, the British Empire. In Malaya, the British Empire forcefully cut off communist insurgents from their principal support base, allowing it to engineer the ethnic makeup of security forces and prevail over imminent armed threats. In Cyprus, the British found themselves in a more precarious position vis-à-vis Greek Cypriot insurgents who constrained the state's options and compelled them to place greater trust in Turkish Cypriots and British expatriates as counterinsurgents. In its suppression of insurgency, this reliance of the colonial state on ethnic out-groups undermined the quality of intelligence available about insurgents and further alienated Greek Cypriot civilians. Importantly, however, the ethnicity of counterinsurgent personnel in both Malaya and Cyprus, did not predict the level of violence used by states. Despite vastly differing ethnically racialized recruiting patterns and contrary to the conventional focus on 'winning hearts and minds' in counterinsurgency, coercion, bribery, and intimidation lay at the heart of both colonial counterinsurgency campaigns. The article concludes that these racialized recruitment policies tend to endure beyond the colonial period and inform the domestic determinants of counterinsurgency practices within post-colonial nation-states.

Keywords: British Empire, ethnicity, military strategy, counterinsurgency, Malaya, Cyprus

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Introduction

In an era of gradually rising inter-state and intra-state civil war, an ever-increasing number of people are being recruited to serve as security forces. Yet in most states, these personnel are not recruited at random from a nationally available pool: a state's security forces are a by-product of the nation's history with and security threats from its various social groups.

Strategic states tend to recruit their security forces disproportionately from some ethnicities while systematically under-representing others. Such a racialized pattern of recruitment is evident in many countries. Recent coverage—showing that Black applicants to the United Kingdom Police force face a 60 per cent higher rejection rate compared to their white counterparts (Faragher, 2023)—clarifies the intentional policy choices at play. These recruiting tactics bring unique returns for states, whose leaders often prefer to share power with ethnic in-groups while excluding others out of fear of revolt and violent takeover. For instance, the kingdom of Bahrain explicitly excludes Shia Muslims from serving in the military (despite them being a majority ethnic group) and instead prefers 'loyal' Sunnis as soldiers. This investment in ethnically similar armies to the ruling class paid dividends for states at the time of revolt. During the Arab Spring, when military personnel from other countries were siding with protestors, Bahrain's Sunni Army speedily confirmed its allegiance to the kingdom by swiftly suppressing the overwhelmingly Shia revolt (Barany, 2011). Yet

ostensibly ethnic loyalty-based security forces are not without social costs: while loyal, coethnics of insurgents can often be especially violent, undisciplined, and corrupt, using coercive abilities to settle personal scores and set escalatory cycles of retaliation in motion.

Ethnic recruiting dynamics, in turn, affect how civilians are treated by security forces, and how they much trust they place in state security forces. For instance, the United States, where the police force is mixed-race yet predominantly white (Kajeepeta & Johnson, 2023), only 19 per cent of Black Americans express confidence in the police relative to 56 per cent of white Americans (Chalfin et al., 2022). Relatedly, Lyall et al. (2015) find that civilians are biased towards in-groups and are more likely to share information (or favour cooperation) with soldiers who share their ethnic identity, even in high-risk wartime settings.

What explains the variation in the degree and depth of racialization of coethnics' recruitment in states' security forces? This article traces the strategic roots of such ethnically driven recruiting practices in response to domestic insurgent threats. It argues that, in response to the specific nature of domestic threats, states systematically manipulate the ethnicity of their recruited soldiers at various levels of the counterinsurgency apparatus. Such social engineering policies have persisted long after colonial empires gave way to nation-states and continue to inform the ethnic recruiting decisions of states' security forces till the present day.

To this end, the article proceeds in three parts. First, it develops a typology of the ethnic social engineering options states have in response to armed domestic threats. It then compares the cases of Cyprus and Malaya to show the costs and benefits that coethnics bring to the table and the loyalty–efficiency paradox that ensues. Based on specific domestic considerations, this paradox plays out in different ways, causing British officials to make divergent ethnic recruiting decisions in both colonies. This analysis considers the critical points at which either important changes occurred or continuities became re-entrenched, and points to the endurance of violence in both counterinsurgent campaigns and of similar strategic social engineering tendencies in post-colonial states. Instead of relying on one-size-fits-all approaches to the ethnic composition of security forces, this article emphasizes the importance of considering the unique state-insurgent dynamics of each conflict when developing counterinsurgency doctrine.

Theory: State Considerations and Social Engineering of Security Forces

Conventional scholarly accounts see shared ethnic identity as a marker of cooperation, making individuals more likely to work with each other to produce in-group welfare and public goods (Fearon & Laitin, 1996; Habyarimana et al., 2009; Lieberman & Singh, 2012), while out-group interaction is more likely to induce competition (Baldwin & Huber, 2010; Easterly & Levine, 1997; Miguel & Gugerty, 2005). In civil war contexts (especially those where armed groups rely on ethnically driven support bases), the salience of ethnic boundaries and polarization is heightened. Ethnic groups are far from unitary actors and defection is common —individuals belonging to the same ethnic groups often enter into dangerous or counterintuitive alliances with insurgents or states (Kalyvas, 2008). Faced with armed challenges, states make strategic decisions about the ethnicity of their security forces. Specifically, they need to decide whether state armed forces will be composed of coethnics (i.e. from the same ethnic groups as the armed groups' targeted support bases), ethnic out-groups (i.e. from ethnic groups other than insurgent support bases), or a combination of the two.

Both choices come with trade-offs. A security force composed of coethnics of insurgents can bring knowledge about insurgent actors, help communicate with local populations, and improve the targeting of violence (Moore, 2019; Stanton, 2015). States, however, are often suspicious of the loyalty of insurgent coethnics. Such recruits can engage in 'double defection', redirecting state resources to insurgents and in others or deserting their ranks when political tensions peak (Mason & Krane, 1989; Souleimanov et al., 2018). Testimony evidence

from the initial phases of Algeria's anti-colonial movement has shown that as the insurgent movement grew stronger, the insurgent National Liberation Front (FLN) actively persuaded young men not to join the French military, and many long-serving soldiers deserted to join the insurgency (Branche, 2017). On the other hand, state armies composed of ethnic out-groups of insurgents are able to ensure loyalty, but lose out on localized knowledge. Not only do armies plagued with military inequality come with worse domestic political and inter-state war outcomes (Lyall, 2020; Wilkinson, 2015) but violence by combatants perceived as ethnic outsiders could further alienate civilians. For instance, Roessler (2016) shows in the case of Sudan that, while the creation of unequal militaries reduces the risk of internal coups d'état, it simultaneously fuels internal dissatisfaction among other social groups, thereby increasing the risk of subsequent civil war.

In effect, the outbreak of violent insurgencies brings a loyalty–efficiency paradox for states. They wish to benefit from coethnics' information networks by recruiting them as soldiers but cannot be sure of their loyalty or the costs it might bring. To balance these considerations, states across the world have considerably varied in decisions around which ethnic groups they will recruit their armed personnel from, and which portion of these troops will be recruited to fight specific insurgencies. In some contexts, such as Black Namibian and Angolan troops fighting in apartheid South Africa's security forces, states urge coethnics of insurgents to ally with the state. In other contexts, such as those of post-colonial Sri Lanka and Myanmar, state decision-makers purge their security cadres of 'politically suspicious' ethnicities who served erstwhile interests.

Given this variation, I argue that that states strategically engineer the ethnicity of counterinsurgents at various levels based on their ability to balance the risks and benefits of hiring coethnics. Table 1 depicts a range of options available to counterinsurgent states in response to ethnically driven insurgencies. It is organized around two dimensions: the extent to which coethnics (versus ethnic out-groups) are officially recruited in the state's apparatus, and the extent to which the state forms temporary (unofficial) alliances with these groups for the purposes of counterinsurgency.

Table 1 Range of Recruiting Options Available to States in Response to Ethnically Driven Insurgencies

Ethnicity; Incorporation Status	Ethnic In-group	Mixed Ethnic	Ethnic Out-group
Formal Counter-insurgent Apparatus	Coethnics formally recruited; on payroll at Army, Police, or paramilitary levels	Coethnic forces recruited at lower levels and led by ethnic out-groups, or vice versa	Ethnic out-groups recruited at Army, Police, or paramilitary levels
Unofficial or Autonomous	Training to or alliances with civilian or ex-insurgent militia drawn from in-groups	Training to or alliances with both coethnics and ethnic out-groups	Training to or alliances with civilian or ex-insurgent militia drawn from out-groups

In their formal counterinsurgency apparatus, states can manipulate the ethnicity of the national army, police, or paramilitary. Individuals recruited at the formal level have a legally acknowledged status, appear on states' official payrolls, and are entitled to employment benefits. These employments often outlast the duration of the conflict. Unofficially, states can enter into secret alliances with defected insurgents or civilian protection forces drawn from affected community members for the purpose of counterinsurgency. Such alliances may be temporary, sometimes dissolved before the conflict ends. Individuals that comprise it do not appear on official records or payrolls, even though they are financially sponsored by the counterinsurgent state (Carey et al., 2016; Jentzsch, 2014). In the proceeding sections, I will show that strategic considerations have historically determined the ethnic composition of security forces across countries, and that these considerations continue to inform contemporary security policy.

Cyprus vs Malaya: Anti-colonial Insurgency and Strategic Ethnic Recruitment

During the peak of the Second World War, the British Empire faced twin challenges: the external threat from Axis powers and the internal challenge from brewing unrest across its colonies. As the threat from the Second World War receded, internal challenges took over as self-determination movements peaked in individual colonies and gained international legitimacy. In response, British officials faced a choice between deploying soldiers at the officer or the troop level from the local colony in question, from other colonies such as India, or from Britain.

If decisions about security force recruitment would have been taken uniformly or randomly at the Empire level, the ethnic balance of soldiers would have either mirrored the ethnic balance of the colony's population, or looked remarkably consistent across time (within the same colony) and space (across colonies). My research—which combines cross-national data from The National Archives (TNA) in the United Kingdom with officer memoirs and case-specific secondary sources—instead shows that the colonial government drew upon its understanding of domestic balance of power in the colony, manpower resources in its own troops, and the level of threat it perceived from each internal challenge.

In this article, I chart how, upon the outbreak of the Communist insurgency in Malaya, the British Empire exploited intra-ethnic fractures within the movement to cultivate a coethnic intelligence network consisting of Chinese recruits at the formal and informal level. These coethnic police, paramilitary, and militia members leveraged their local knowledge to facilitate the location, tracking, and surrender of insurgent personnel, leading to eventual counterinsurgent victory. In contrast, the development of the EOKA-led insurgency in Cyprus raised the costs of hiring Greek Cypriots relative to the informational benefits that such recruits could bring. In response to these constraints, British officials relied on local security forces from ethnic out-groups belonging to the Turkish Cypriot community, a move that further alienated Greek Cypriot civilians and strengthened insurgent intelligence networks. An analysis of the divergent dynamics in the two cases demonstrates the theorized loyalty–efficiency paradox and the resultant variation at work. Coethnics bring unique informational benefits that do not accrue to ethnic out-groups, and yet, owing to the considerable risks of hiring coethnics, states are not able to automatically hire them.

Malaya: Communist Insurgency Unfolds

The Communist insurgency in Malaya[1] was an armed conflict between the British Commonwealth and the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA), the armed wing of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). In seeking to establish an independent communist state in Malaya, the MCP organized agitations and strikes, and the MNLA launched several attacks on the British security forces and the local population. To this end, the insurgent MNLA benefitted from a close civilian support network in the form of Chinese 'squatters'—a group of 500,000 ethnic-Chinese Malayans, many of whom had settled in cleared areas of the jungle after being forced out of their villages during Chinese occupation (Ucko, 2019). With the outbreak of insurgency in 1948, the state deployed a mixed-ethnic recruiting strategy for its security force to overcome its constraints and eventually prevail over insurgent groups by 1960.

When the communist insurgency broke out, Malayan security forces badly lacked Chinese recruits and linguists. Instead, in line with its earlier policies, British officials continued to recruit Army battalions from a mix of recruits that were largely ethnic out-groups of insurgents. A report from 1955 states that the Army forces for Emergency purposes consisted of 'six British, one Australian, six Gurkha, seven Malay, one Federation, one African, and one Fijian' battalions (TNA, FCO 141/7340). In racialized terms, these battalions included non-local and local ethnic out-groups of insurgents. Troops from other colonies were often desirable

within the Army—they came with international experience from the Second World War that was directly useful to their counterinsurgent duties in Malaya. For instance, a report (Sunderland, 1964, p. 28) on Army Operations in Malaya (1947–1960) notes:

> One great asset of the Commonwealth force was that, when the Emergency began, the British and Gurkha soldiers knew jungle war from their experience in Burma in World War II and were improving their skill by continual practice. Of the nine British and Gurkha battalions [present in Malaya] in 1948, six had fought in Burma in World War II. Two of them, the last Battalion of the 7th Gurkha Rifle Regiment and the 1st Battalion of the 10th (Princess Mary's Own) Gurkha Rifles, had the added advantage of having fought communist guerrillas in Burma after the war before being transferred to Malaya.

Despite these experiential advantages, however, the Army found itself undermanned and unorganized to deal with communist subversion. For starters, Army troops were completely dependent on the ethnically imbalanced and sparsely spread local police for information and identification of guerrillas. There were no police stations among the fringes of the jungle where insurgent supporters lived. Moreover, 'the mainly Malay police force of 9,000 (for a population of five million, of which 38 percent or two million were Chinese) had only three Chinese officers and twenty-seven inspectors. They were unprepared to deal with a 90 percent plus Chinese insurgent force that grew to about 4,000 by the year's end' (Hack, 2017). As a result of the Empire's lack of credible information from local sources, the insurgency continued to grow in support and numbers.

In effect, the British in Malaya faced a loyalty–efficiency paradox: they needed the informational advantages that coethnics of insurgents would bring but worried that they might redirect state resources to the insurgency. In 1951, Oliver Lyttleton (then Britain's Secretary of State for the Colonies) summarized the dilemma: 'We could not win the war without the help of the population, and of the Chinese population in particular; we would not get the help of the population without at least beginning to win the war.'

Mixed-Ethnic Recruiting Responses to Counter Ethnically Driven Insurgent Membership

To remedy these gaps, the British Empire began to infuse Malay Muslim and ethnic Chinese locals into the Army, Police, and paramilitary levels. Given the threat from Chinese support of the insurgency, however, the colonial state was cautious in balancing the ethnic dynamics of such recruitment across levels: while ethnic Chinese individuals were incorporated into (and pivotal to the success of) the counterinsurgency, they were always recruited alongside, or under the leadership of, ethnic outsiders.

At the Army level, even though the rank-and-file level was diversified to include locals (mostly Malay Muslims and some ethnic Chinese), it was ensured that British and other colonial officers (i.e. non-local ethnic out-groups) continued to occupy key leadership positions. Sunderland notes that 'at any given time from the early 1950s onward, about one-third of all infantry battalions in Malaya were Gurkha, one-third British and one-third from Malaya and the Commonwealth. The number of Malay battalions rose steadily as more Malay NCOs, officers and cadres were trained' (Sunderland, 1964, pp. 35–36).

While innovations at the Army level were relatively limited with regard to the recruitment of insurgent coethnics, British reports about the paramilitary (i.e. Home Guard and Police) levels reveal a strong emphasis on incorporating Chinese recruits in an otherwise mixed-ethnic security force framework.

The Malayan Police Special Branch was set up in 1948 to replace the Malayan Security Services (MSS), which had failed to anticipate the Malayan Communist Party's (MCP) switch to armed revolution (Comber, 2008). Soon after, however, British officials visiting Malaya noted that the dearth of Chinese or British Cantonese-speaking officers hampered Special Branch work. They recommended that the Special Branch be restructured

to include more Chinese officers and invited British police and intelligence agencies to train new recruits (Sinclair, 2013).

As a result of these efforts, the number of ethnic Chinese in the force more than doubled by 1952 (Hack, 1999b, p. 395). Even among British recruits to the police, Chinese language training and civics education was emphasized; there were at least 42 European police officers who could speak Chinese and General Templer had organized civics courses in which up to 30 Chinese villagers were brought to government offices to give talks and tours of government installations. British soldier (and later counterinsurgency theorist) Richard Clutterbuck noted the dividends that such restructuring brought to infiltrating the MCP: 'Ultimately, Special Branch became so skilled, its mastery of communist psychology so great, that it could capture a communist courier, convert him, and put him back on his route, appropriately closer his destination, with no terrorist the wiser' (Clutterbuck, 1966, p. 61).

As with the Army, however, ethnic Chinese recruits in the police were supervised by a leadership corps consisting of local ethnic outsiders. Malhi (2023) notes that '[a]lmost all the Special Constables, nine-tenths of the Auxiliary Police, and 60 per cent of the Home Guard were Malay Muslims, while the majority of those being policed (and detained) were Chinese' (p. 451). Leadership officials, in turn, kept close cheques on the dynamics of these racialized groups by maintaining annual records—of kills versus contacts ratio, the number of weapons lost as a proportion of their holdings, the number of terrorists they eliminated, and the number of guns they captured—of each ethnic group (TNA, FCO 141/7340).

At the paramilitary level, the British government made attempts to increase not just local, but also coethnic representation. As late as 1951, even though 100,000 Malayans belonged to the paramilitary force, only 10 per cent (i.e. 1,860 of 18,466) of the Special Constables in the Home Guard (served as a local security force to guard villages at night in shifts) were Chinese, even though most of the insurgents (referred to as 'Communist Terrorists' by the British) killed up until that date belonged to that ethnic category. In response, both General Templer (then-High Commissioner and Director of Operations) and Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton pushed for the creation and arming of Chinese Home Guard which would 'be looked upon only as a first step to trying to gain much more Chinese support and to enlisting much larger numbers of them in the police' (Nagl, 2009, pp. 76–77).

Despite fears that the Chinese would defect with their weapons to the rebels, 50,000 Chinese willingly joined the Home Guards, and by 1954, 150 Chinese villages were protected by their own security force (Coates, 1992, pp. 120–121).

Recruiting ethnic Chinese to fight their coethnic insurgents came with risks, but the British stood firmly behind the symbolic benefits such recruitment would bring. For instance, the Director of Operations in Malaya noted in 1955:

> Losses of guns by the Chinese Home Guard have been a most disturbing feature . . . (and) have raised a cry in some quarters that the Chinese element of the Home Guard is unreliable and ought to be disbanded. However, this has been firmly resisted . . . To disband units would not only encourage inefficiency in other units (since the Chinese dislike having to serve), but would also admit to failure in a delicate experiment to weld the Chinese Home Guard into a thoroughly reliable force. Such a step would be a first class victory for the Communists. (TNA, FCO 141/7340)

To deal with these risks, the colonial state continued coethnic recruitment while also putting special safeguards in place to avoid a concentration of coethnic power against the Empire: the force had no uniforms, received no pay, and had few weapons. A village home guard detachment of 60 to 100 men might have 12 rifles, just enough to arm one shift of guards. After each shift, the guards would turn the rifles or shotguns over to the next shift (Corum, 2006, p. 13).

Finally, the prospect of collaborating with ex-insurgents for counterinsurgency at the militia level caused special consternation among the British Empire. Eventually, Hugh Carleton Greene (director of Emergency Information Services in Malaya), persuaded then-Director of Operations General Briggs to accept the concept of rewards for surrendering by threatening to resign in 1950. Accordingly, a Special Operations Volunteer Force —consisting of Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP), Captured Enemy Personnel (CEP), and other selected volunteers—was set up (Ramakrishna, 2002, p. 142).

Through this programme, ex-insurgent detainees were coerced in custody and sometimes induced with financial rewards to betray their armed group, become allies of the state, and hunt down or convert their former comrades (Yao, 2016). Their value, as former British military officer Lucian Pye wrote, was twofold: first, they were a drain on one of the MCP's scarcest resources—willing jungle fighters. Second, they were fluent in Chinese languages and 'of the same race and . . . background' as the communist insurgents, making them more effective than out-group soldiers (Malhi, 2023). Once recruited, these individuals were kept on close watch under foreign (ethnic out-group) leadership: they were formed into platoons of about 15 men each and placed under the command of British police lieutenants (Ramakrishna, 2013, p. 62). They volunteered for 18 months, lived in police compounds, and received salaries similar to those of regular policemen in return for their activities (Rahman, 2013, p. 42).

Why Did Coethnics Join the Counterinsurgent Effort?

Mixed-ethnic recruiting policies, such as those witnessed in Malaya, are difficult to achieve even among the strongest of states in the face of an active insurgency. How then, did the British Empire induce the ethnic Chinese to cooperate despite their support for communist insurgency in Malaya? The memoirs of British policy-makers in Malaya have stressed that 'winning hearts and minds' was the key to their victory. Yet, a closer look suggests that a sustained campaign of intimidation, population control, and the leveraging of intra-ethnic divisions within the insurgent support base better explains why Chinese recruits joined the counterinsurgency.

Counterinsurgents subscribed to the assumption that the Malayan Chinese were particularly susceptible to insurgent threats and had 'no real inducement' to give information. Consequently, they believed that cutting links between insurgents and villagers through physical separation would allow security forces to establish greater contact with locals, offering rewards for sharing intelligence about insurgents or tightening coercion to compel submission (Hack, 2017).

To this end, under the 'Briggs Plan', the British deliberately relocated the Chinese squatter population into freshly established and closely guarded 'New Villages'—a network of about 509 peri-urban detention camps built between 1950 and 1954—to cut insurgents off from their Malayan Chinese support bases (Bennett & Mumford, 2014; Cohen, 2014; French, 2012; Phee, 2022). Within these camps, the British undertook 'population control' through policies such as food control, detention without trial, and mass resettlement. Malhi (2023) notes that these camps further allowed the state to undertake 'mass, racialised surveillance' specific to the ethnic Chinese population: only a very small number of Malay Muslims were detained in New Villages (255 between 1952 and 1956) and they were held in separate institutions to Chinese Malayans (451). These policies together forced guerrillas to expose themselves to patrols and ambushes and eventually to surrender and enrol as 'Emergency volunteers' in increasing numbers under the pressure of hunger. 'The SEPs citing hunger as their reason for surrendering rose from none in 1949–1951 to 29 percent in January–February 1955. Those citing a corollary reason—hopelessness—increased from 21 to 36 percent over the same period' (Komer, 1972, p. 61).

To maximize insurgent surrenders, especially at the militia level, the Malayan Police Special Branch dropped off leaflets (numbering about 77 million in 1953) and used loudspeaker aircraft to broadcast messages of rewards for those who would lay down their arms (Hannon & Robert, 2016, p. 20); Figure 1 displays one of these

leaflets. Officers leveraged information from captured SEPs to personally direct broadcast messages and pamphlets at individual terrorists. For instance, Leaflet 1434 (3 December 1952) targeted at Communist insurgents warned: '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' (Hack, 2009). Other leaflets tended to stress the futility of life in the jungle, and the stressed that the likely outcomes of helping insurgents were detention, death, or deportation. To drive the message home outside the jungle, the British government sponsored the making and presentation of films in the villages, and these cinema vans were accompanied by one or two former Communist warriors who spoke directly to the people about their life in the jungle and their reasons for changing sides (Nagl, 2009, p. 94).

Figure 1 A Propaganda Leaflet Dropped on Malayan Insurgents in 1953, Offering a $1000 Reward in Exchange for Insurgents' Bren Gun

Source: UK Department of Information, courtesy Wikipedia Commons.

Overall, through their multi-pronged counterinsurgency policies, the British were able to leverage competing ethnic and ideological fractures within the Chinese community to further coerce coethnics into serving as counterinsurgents. Hack (1999a) notes that:

> for many [ethnic Chinese], communism did not represent a commitment to an ideology or to a cause such as nationalism, but rather was more a means of adapting to a changing and modernizing world, a potential avenue of advancement or a personal commitment. For others, it was simply the most prestigious pro-Chinese, anti-Japanese body of the war, or for still others, a means of addressing

> social and economic grievances. In all these cases, the motivating force may have been less powerful than that involved in nationalism per se'.

(Hack, 1999a, pp. 122–123).

By identifying such fissures, the colonial state was able to undercut insurgent support by using strategic incentives across various groups of ethnic Chinese. These included the provision of safe passes and amnesties for ex-insurgents (TNA, FCO 141/7521; TNA, FCO 141/7225; TNA, FCO 141/7308), the relocation and surveillance of insurgent support bases (TNA, FCO 141/7460), and the deployment of influential Chinese individuals into administrative efforts such as the War Executive Committee (TNA, FCO 141/7438; TNA, FCO 141/7340). Together, these policies allowed the British to prevail over the conflict by coopting ethnic Chinese who looked like insurgents but didn't necessarily identify with their aims.

Cyprus: Shifting Alliances, Shifting Reliance

While previous sections have established that states perceive coethnics as coming with unique skillsets in counterinsurgency, they have not ruled out the possibility that coethnics are only hired where such recruits are willing or able to serve as counterinsurgents, and where states are able to absorb the loyalty–efficiency paradox of such recruitment. In order to test this proposition, I consider another case from the British Empire: that of an anti-colonial insurgency in Cyprus. According to the census carried out by the British administration in 1946, most of the island colony's population was divided between two major ethnic groups: Turkish Cypriots (about 18 per cent of the population) and Greek Cypriots (about 77 per cent of the population).

Cyprus' reliance on local forces as soldiers continued both, during and after the Second World War. Between 1939 and 1945, several thousand Greek and Turkish Cypriots enlisted and served in the Cyprus Regiment, a colonial regiment of the British Army. During this time, care was taken to maintain the counterbalancing of local ethnicities in the Cyprus Regiment; even before the first Cypriot unit was formed, British authorities decided to replicate the ethnic balance of the island's population and bent the rules to achieve the desired ethnic mix. On 14 September 1939, barely two weeks into the Second World War, Major Davidson-Houston, the first recruitment officer appointed to raise forces in Cyprus, stated in his report that 'a proportion of Turks will be taken as this is most necessary from the point of view of local policy' (Kazamias, 2007, p. 337). Throughout the war, the ethnic composition of the Cypriot regiment remained almost constant in line with the population. At this time, the Cyprus Police Force (CPF) was also a polyglot organization composed of Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot, and British officers.

In the following decade, however, external threats were replaced by internal ones as an insurgent challenge took shape in the colony. Led by the National Organization of Cypriot Struggle (EOKA), an ethno-nationalist guerrilla armed group, the organization was predominantly youth-based and composed of Greek Cypriots. The movement aimed to compel the British colonial government to disperse its forces and cede Cyprus to Greece.

Almost immediately, the EOKA-led insurgency exposed the weaknesses of the British military force in Cyprus. French (2015) notes that Cyprus was a fragile colony of the Empire, owing to a lack of money and limited ability to impose ideological hegemony or physical force on the population. As a result, 'British power rested on a fine balance that combined a minimum of coercion with a far larger element of consent and collaboration' (p. 14).

To plug manpower gaps and restore order, British authorities moved to recruit greater numbers into the CPF, but the outbreak of hostilities created new problems for the police force. On one end, the EOKA, in addition to targeting British security force personnel, also attacked those (such as Greek policemen and bureaucrats) that they identified as Greek Cypriot 'traitors' or 'agents of the colonial state'. Figures compiled from the Greek Cypriot press suggest that EOKA killed 148 fellow Greek Cypriots and injured a further 69. Security force reports and English-language press sources on the island suggest figures of 187 killed and 181 injured (French, 2015, p.

139). The intimidation and assassination of the opponents in the Greek Cypriot community presented the greatest obstacle to British schemes to end the 'Cyprus Emergency', because coethnics could not be hired as counterinsurgents out of their presumed support for the EOKA (Novo, 2012).

On the other hand, Turkish Cypriots—fearful that the annexation of Cyprus to Greece would result in hardship and discrimination—were enthusiastic to serve British counterinsurgency. Yet, given that Turks were 'ethnic out-groups' to the insurgency, they did not possess the skills to be able to action intelligence, apprehend couriers, or infiltrate insurgent groups. As with Malaya, the British Empire faced a loyalty–efficiency paradox: while Greek Cypriots would have come with unique intelligence and access that could help the British prevail over the insurgency, Greek Cypriot police officers either resigned or faced deteriorating morale resulting from their fear of (or sympathy towards) insurgents. In contrast to Malaya, then, the costs of hiring coethnics in this case were higher than any benefits recruits could bring.

As Greek Cypriot counterinsurgents became suspicious and inaccessible to British objectives over time, the preference for local and non-local ethnic out-groups transformed into official policy. At the police level, British officials created two counterinsurgency branches—the Auxiliary Police and the Mobile Reserve Police Unit—that recruited only Turkish (i.e. local, ethnic out-groups of insurgents) personnel. Anderson (1993) catalogues British attempts to resolve the loyalty–efficiency paradox:

> unable to rely upon Greek Cypriot police, the British were compelled to place greater trust in Turkish recruits . . . [T]he British [also] needed a reliable and efficient body of police to carry out critical operations and to serve as an example to Cypriot recruits: this was to be achieved by the creation of a unit of police seconded from Britain [i.e. non-local ethnic out-groups of insurgents]'. (p. 186)

The raising of new Turkish Cypriot forces, combined with the 'virtual cessation of recruitment among the Greek Cypriot population' (Novo, 2012, p. 412) rapidly turned the ethnic composition of CPF on its head between 1954 and 1956. On the eve of the insurgency in 1954, the police force (a total of 1,386 recruits) was composed of over 850 Greek (Orthodox) Cypriots and 508 Turkish (Muslim) Cypriots. By December 1956, the number of Greek Cypriot policemen had plummeted to 697, and the remaining 1,135 members of the regular police force (totalling 1,879 recruits) were Turkish Cypriots (Novo, 2012, p. 413).

The leadership of the Cypriot police was provided by British expatriate officers. They dominated the gazetted (i.e. most senior) ranks of the force and also provided leadership at lower levels. To persuade British policemen for service on the island, each man was given a step up in rank, and most were placed in charge of police stations. As a result, rural police stations were manned by a mixture of locally recruited officers under the command of British police sergeants drawn from the UK Police Unit, and areas that were considered to be especially vulnerable were 'underpinned' (i.e. protected) by a small, permanent army garrison (French, 2015, pp. 119, 169).

A reliance on ethnic out-groups in the counterinsurgency apparatus often undermined intelligence gathering and trust-building between insurgent supporters and the state. For instance, after a considerable number of Greek Cypriot policemen had been arrested because of their involvement with EOKA, the Special Branch relied on British expatriates and Turkish Cypriots to lead intelligence gathering. However, officers soon noted that 'the majority of Greek speaking Englishmen are liable to be misled by the local patois and expressions, whilst the Turk is prone to translate only that which he thinks you want to know', leading to a lack of actionable intelligence (French, 2015, pp. 124–125).

At the informal level, the Turkish Cypriot population organized its own paramilitary organization to counter the EOKA. This organization, named the Turkish Defence Organization (TMT), was created in 1956 and had its roots in earlier underground organizations (such as the Vulkan) that sprang up with Turkish government support in response to the Greek Cypriot insurgency. In the second phase of the conflict, the TMT actively

supported the British, who in turn ordered the paramilitary organization to attack and expel Greek Cypriots from those areas where the Turks were the majority in an attempt to impose partition. The communal violence that followed further increased the mistrust between the Greek population and the British administration (Scarinzi, 2021, pp. 212–214). A District Commissioner reported that one reason for the growing hostility exhibited by many Greek Cypriots towards the government was 'the known fact that practically all the Temporary Special Constables in the town are Turkish and so are most of the Auxiliary Police' (French, 2015, p. 120).

Why Did Ethnic Out-groups Join the Force and Coethnics Leave?

The preceding discussion makes clear that, even though the outbreak of hostilities prevented British decision-makers from using Greek Cypriots as counterinsurgents, the use of Turkish Cypriots and British security as counterinsurgents forces further alienated Greeks and provided fodder for EOKA propaganda. In a desperate attempt to fill manpower gaps, the British administration was forced to field Turkish Cypriots who had criminal backgrounds, little training in the profession, and a high proclivity towards indiscriminate violence (Corum, 2006, p. 32).

Why were the British unable to elicit the cooperation of Greek civilians against the insurgency, as they had done in Malaya? EOKA leadership believed that their persuasion and fight for justice in light of British excesses prevented Greek Cypriots from cooperating with counterinsurgents. Indeed, the insurgent EOKA was able to recruit some coethnic policemen within the service to collaborate in providing detailed intelligence, encourage others to resign from the force, and prevent Greeks from signing up for new waves of police recruitment (Corum, 2006). EOKA leader Georgios Grivas, crediting British counterinsurgency strategy with feeding more Greek recruits into insurgent ranks, declared that a statue should be raised to Field Marshal Harding (then-Governor General of Cyprus), 'since he had done more than anybody else to keep alive the spirit of Hellenic resistance in Cyprus' (Holland, 1998, p. 210). The EOKA's strong local intelligence networks among the rural population allowed small guerrilla bands of Greek insurgents to regularly evade attack and target British manpower and counterinsurgency campaigns, while British officials remained handicapped by a lack of accurate information.

Other observers, however, argue that the EOKA's campaign of terror frightened Greek Cypriots into cooperating with insurgents, and that 'the intimidation of the Greek Cypriot community presented the greatest obstacle to British schemes to end the "Cyprus Emergency"' (Thomas & Curless, 2017, p. 3). The EOKA was known to conduct brutal and public killings of those suspected to be informers or traitors. To prevent denunciations against them, the EOKA distributed periodic leaflets pointing to the racism of the British empire and called for passive resistance in the form of boycotting British goods such as chocolates, alcohol, cigarettes and tobacco, soap, washing powder, fabrics, shoes, agricultural tools, or anything that could be a source of income for the British (J/8030.d.2). Others extolled the memory of dead EOKA fighters, threatening to assassinate anyone who worked against them, and warning people against gossiping about the insurgents in case 'paid agents' overheard them. In stark contrast to leaflets in Malaya that emphasized the high costs of cooperating with insurgents and offered inducements to surrender to the state, the insurgents controlled the narrative setting and the flow of information to civilians in Cyprus. For instance, Figure 2 depicts a slain EOKA fighter, and features the following text: 'A chatty person killed him! By saying he was a member of the EOKA.'

Figure 2 A Leaflet from October 1958 that Recommends Greek Cypriots to Avoid Chatter and Gossip Against the EOKA (J/8030)

Source: Archive of the British Library, European Studies Blog (2023).

In light of such a widespread intimidation campaign, one option for British administration would have been to create a physical separation between EOKA insurgents and Greek Cypriots through a 'New Villages' model as in Malaya. Scholars studying Cyprus have shown that while this formula was well-known to policy-makers but there are no indications that they ever considered applying it. As before, the colonial government was in a more precarious position in Cyprus than Malaya, and the former lacked the monetary resources to undertake forced relocation. Moreover, the insurgents' call for Enosis (the political union of Cyprus and Greece) enjoyed international support from the government of Greece and domestic support from Greek Cypriot lawyers. As a result, even though the scale of brutality was much greater in Malaya, the excesses in Cyprus received much more publicity, which in turn further constrained the British. Drohan argues:

> In Cyprus, the local legal elite established a vocal advocacy network that defended the rights of Greek Cypriots from the effects of repressive Emergency regulations. These advocates challenged counter-insurgency laws, which transformed the colonial legal system into a contested space in which British authorities had to justify their actions to Greek Cypriots, domestic British audiences and in the international arena. (Drohan, 2017, p. 99)

In the face of sustained EOKA intimidation of Greek Cypriots willing to enlist as counterinsurgents, and the inability of the administration to physically isolate civilians from insurgents, the British administration was forced to fill their security force ranks with Turkish Cypriots. Such a decision, in turn, negatively impacted the state's ability to prevail over insurgents—the conflict culminated in 1959 with a negotiated settlement between

the two actors, without a clear victory for either side. Yet, the selective arming of both sides resulted in extreme distrust between the two communities. By 1963, agreed-upon power sharing arrangements had broken down, leading to open warfare between EOKA and TMT in December 1963 and leaving the country divided along ethnic lines.

Discussion

An analysis of the Cyprus and Malaya cases clarifies the contrasts in the British Empire's ethnically racialized hiring policies and lends credence to the main argument—that the decision to hire coethnics itself was a *strategic* move. First, comparing two colonies within the same empire shows that even for the same administration (i.e. the British Empire), opportunities to leverage coethnics as counterinsurgents were less available in combatting the ethnically driven and cohesive insurgency (as in Cyprus) as opposed to the ideologically driven and fragmented insurgency (as in Malaya). Second, once hired, coethnics were often able to leverage informational networks to provide intelligence necessary for prevailing over insurgency. Despite these benefits to the colonial state, however, the loyalty–efficiency paradox prevented the state from automatically hiring coethnics. As in Cyprus, when states find themselves constrained vis-à-vis cohesive, ethnically driven insurgencies, coethnic recruitment comes with greater risks.

Finally, and in contrast to the literature on militia ethnicity, the hiring of coethnics does not by itself make conflicts less violent or more focused on winning popular support: even where coethnics are hired, coercion, bribery, and intimidation were at the heart of counterinsurgency. Beyond the context of Malaya and Cyprus, scholars investigating contexts of coethnic versus ethnic out-group use find no restraint in violence in contexts where the former were used. For instance, Kenyan counterinsurgent forces became infamous for the large-scale atrocities that they mounted against those suspected of Mau Mau sympathies (Branch, 2010). The systematic nature of such evidence has led scholars analysing colonial and post-colonial counterinsurgency to conclude that 'although unpalatable, it was really brutal repression and bribery that brought each conflict to an end' (Hazelton, 2021), regardless of the ethnicity of recruits.

From the perspective of the imperatives of the colonial state, the best the state could expect is for coethnic counterinsurgents to leverage their intra-ethnic grassroots networks to conduct effective violence. At a middling level, defectors could be militarily successful but cause negative externalities in other spheres. At worst, coethnics could exacerbate the conflict by undermining the established counterinsurgent apparatus or by using state resources to benefit insurgents. States, in turn, take stock of individual insurgencies at various points in time to weigh the opportunities, costs, and benefits of recruiting coethnics as counterinsurgents.

The Path Forward: Future Research and Policy Considerations

In reflecting on their counterinsurgency campaigns, memoirs by British decision-makers have emphasized a 'lessons learned' approach, emphasizing the need for intelligence sharing across conflict contexts. These lessons have often revolved around the need to co-opt local allies—from Ulster Protestants, Turkish Cypriots, or indigenous Malays—to provide British regimes with information. However, such prescriptions assume that successful counterinsurgency is independent of context and that local allies are a monolithic category and that successful counterinsurgency involves using multi-pronged strategies to 'win hearts and minds'.

The foregoing findings offer some nuance to these understandings in two ways. First, they complicate the category of 'locals' to further investigate the strategies behind the ethnic makeup of security forces. More importantly, they show that the one-size-fits all approach to counterinsurgency misses the unique interactions —between each state and its insurgencies—that in turn decide the degree and depth of deploying coethnics. In

other words, decisions to recruit ethnic in-groups versus out-groups (or a mix thereof) as counterinsurgents are themselves an artefact of conflict dynamics. Finally, they demonstrate that regardless of their ethnic makeup, counterinsurgencies by their very nature involve violence, coercion, bribery, and intimidation.

As decolonization brought about the transfer of power to local governments, questions of the composition and control of local security forces took centre stage in each colony. While the Colonial Office encouraged colonial governments to ensure the independence of the police from political interference, British practices in each colony had hardly been a model to follow. Killingray and Anderson (2017) note that:

> the attempt to transform the colonial police into a politically neutral body that would be a loyal and impartial servant of the successor state had a poor base from which to build . . . The impartiality of the police was also often compromised by ethnic patterns of recruitment that had created and maintained forces unrepresentative of the population they policed'.
>
> (Killingray & Anderson, 2017, p. 13)

Policies of independent states have consequently continued to feature colonial pursuance. Scholarship focusing on security force ethnic compositions over time finds that states across the world tend to recruit disproportionate combinations of troops relative to their population, and these compositions frequently change in response to domestic political constraints and threats (Horowitz, 2000; Johnson & Thurber, 2020; Morency-Laflamme & McLauchlin, 2020; Quinlivan, 1999). For instance, even after India's independence, traditional 'martial races' (including minority populations such as the Sikhs) continued to make up about 75–80 per cent of the Indian Army's officer corps, while the proportion of other religious minorities as officers (such as Muslims) steadily declined (Khalidi, 2001; Wilkinson, 2015).

Understanding the deeper historical roots of security forces' changing compositions in response to specific conflicts would replace simplistic understandings of counterinsurgency doctrine and aid the development of context-sensitive solutions to ongoing conflicts. Data from colonial sources considered in this article can be combined with post-colonial source material to explore further the legacies of the colonial army's ethnically racialized composition in informing post-colonial states' ethnic recruiting patterns.

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