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SECURITY INFORMATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 280

SUBJECT: The Situation in Kenya

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1. The gravity of the current wave of lawlessness in Kenya is indicated by the dispatch to that colony of a British infantry battalion by air from Sues and a cruiser from the Mediterranean fleet. This action suggests that the colony's own security forces -- the police, British officered African troop units, and home guard or vigilante groups totalling some 2,000 whites -- may not be sufficient to cope with the spreading depredations of the native Mau Mau secret society.

2. We first heard of the Mau Mau about four years ago, but intelligence of its aims and tactics became available (apparently to the British as well as the US) only very recently, when the movement initiated its campaign of terrorism. The Society's objectives are believed to be to drive the whites off the fertile Kenya highlands, and eventually out of Africa. Its tactics are terrorism -- cattle-maiming, arson, mutilation, and murder. Its rites involve witchcraft, oaths, and curses; and its ability to enforce secrecy is remarkable. In composition the Mau Mau appears to be almost wholly drawn from the Kikuyu, one of the largest of the Kenya tribes, about 1,000,000-strong. The Mau Mau has a large field for expansion, for the Kikuyu have spread from Kenya to Uganda and parts of Tanganyika. There is a strong possibility that in all areas where the Kikuyu reside in numbers the Society has cells which are propagating its ideas of power and plenty through terrorism.

3. Virtually no facts are available as to the size and leadership of the Mau Mau. Its size has been estimated as high as 200,000; more likely it is much smaller, but it obtains the cooperation of many non-members by intimidation. Though hundreds of arrests have been made, these appear to be only of small fry and fanatics, who refuse to give information or have none to give. It is probable that the stage has been reached at which the individual Kikuyu, aware of Mau Mau ruthlessness against dissidents and informers, considers it safer to be inside the Society when invited than to remain outside.

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4. Recent Mau Mau depredations are raising racial tensions, undermining confidence between black and white, and thus putting Kenya's social structure in jeopardy. Many Kikuyu are trusted domestic servants and farm-hands for the whites. Many others work as clerks in every government department. Regarded as the most intelligent and adaptable natives in East Africa, the Kikuyu quickly mastered the Western techniques of mass meetings, delegations, and petitions, and the British Colonial Office expected to entrust them with increasing political responsibility in Kenya. The principal native political organization in East Africa, the Kenya African Union, is almost wholly Kikuyu and aims to achieve nationalist objectives by constitutional means; it may be discovered to have a surreptitious connection with the Mau Mau.

5. If sufficient force can be concentrated in the areas most concerned, as the British appear to intend, and if the natives' fear of breaking secrecy can be overcome, the back of the conspiracy may be broken in a few weeks. No situation like that in Malaya is emerging, and there is no evidence of external aid for the Mau Mau. Swift success by the British is essential, or the situation will rapidly deteriorate. In any event, developments in Kenya will dash the hopes of those groups outside who press for a rapid transfer of political responsibility to Africans. They will confirm the white settlers' fears that London gives primitive natives too big a dose of civilization too fast, and that such a policy carries a threat to the security of British settlements in Africa.

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