

## Funeral Planning: British involvement in the funeral of President Jomo Kenyatta

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### Abstract

The funeral of Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, offers revealing evidence of the intimacy and depth of Britain's continuing relationship with this former colony, fifteen years after independence.

First approached by leading Kenyans for assistance in planning the funeral in 1968, British policymakers willingly became involved, and continued low-level preparations for this over the following decade. When Kenyatta finally died, in 1978, British advice and planning lay behind the central elements of a funeral which incoming president Daniel arap Moi used to publicly demonstrate his succession. Yet the story of the funeral also shows that the relationship was sometimes incoherent and drew on multiple, sometimes cross-cutting, personal ties and institutional links, both political and military; neither the funeral itself, nor Kenya's politics, worked to a script written by British officials.

The British press coverage of the funeral in 1978 of Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, highlighted a moment of diplomatic near-embarrassment. Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, was seated only two places from Idi Amin – the president of Uganda and a man who had established himself in the British popular imagination as the embodiment of all that was wrong with post-colonial African leadership. *The Times* reported excitedly that Charles 'narrowly missed having his hand seized' by Amin.<sup>1</sup> This near-miss – dismissed by the British High Commissioner as 'entirely mythical' – was soon forgotten.<sup>2</sup> A more historically significant aspect of the grand pageant of the funeral was captured by the rumour reported in the UK press that the gun carriage, flown from Britain for the occasion, was the one that had been used in the state funeral of Winston Churchill.<sup>3</sup> It is hard to imagine a more striking symbol of the transformation in British attitudes towards Kenyatta. Only eighteen years earlier he had been denounced by Kenya's Governor as 'the African leader to darkness and death';<sup>4</sup> now, he was being placed on a par with (perhaps even on the gun carriage of) the most famous British politician of the century.

British influence at this funeral was far more entrenched than this press coverage suggested, and had a much longer history than the few days after Kenyatta's death on 22 August 1978. In fact, the British High Commission had first been consulted on the potential funeral in 1968. The funeral planning shows the continuing depth and intimacy of the relationship between the governments of Britain and Kenya almost fifteen years after independence. Senior figures in the Kenyan government turned to the British in the first instance to ask for advice and assistance; the British government was brought into contingency plans which involved only a few in the highest circles of power in Kenya; and British policy makers willingly provided assistance. The planning (and performance) of the funeral offers valuable insights into a relationship which recent scholarship has shown to be both close and complex.

In the immediate decades after independence, the post-colonial Anglo-Kenyan relationship was often framed as neo-colonialism. Inspired by a world-systems approach, this was coupled with theories of dependency and underdevelopment. Leys highlighted continuities which remained after

independence to argue that the unequal colonial relationship was altered only minimally by independence.<sup>5</sup> Such arguments have been premised on the idea that, as Chikeka has argued, the European colonisers 'traded positions of political power with positions of influence', and thus the interests of Kenya remained subservient to those of Britain.<sup>6</sup> The critical weaknesses of that strand of dependency literature was its limited discussion of how dependency worked in practice, focussed as it typically was on the abstract with little evidence of mechanisms. Particularly relevant to this article, it failed to either question or explore the ways in which governments, and more particularly groups within governments, talked to one another.

More recent historiography on Kenya has nuanced our understanding of this relationship. Britain's post-colonial significance to Kenya has been widely recognised as part of a wider debate in which scholars have highlighted continuities and colonial legacies, increasingly 'treating independence as an artificial historical divide'.<sup>7</sup> In Kenya, these continuities formed part of a broader process of nation-building occurring in multiple and varied ways that were often heavily influenced by the colonial legacy, for example with a continued focus upon development and statism.<sup>8</sup> Despite the brutal British repression of Mau Mau, Kenya's post-colonial leaders continued to look towards Britain in many areas, of which Kenyatta's funeral offers just one example.<sup>9</sup>

Yet by contrast, much of the literature on British foreign policy quickly and cleanly removes the majority of the empire at independence. These histories have tended to focus on Europe and America and lack substantive discussion of relations with former African colonies with limited academic interest in continuities.<sup>10</sup> An extreme example of this comes from Northedge who, surveying the previous thirty years of British foreign policy in the mid-1970s, saw the end of empire as decisive: 'colonial policy disappeared with the passing of the colonial empire. Relations between Britain and the now independent states of the Commonwealth were then conducted ... in the same way as relations with any other state'.<sup>11</sup> Northedge's argument is clearly mistaken, as the work of those scholars interested in the Kenyan side has shown. As Darwin has rightly recognised, '[e]xternal alterations concealed inner continuities'.<sup>12</sup>

As this study of British involvement in the funeral planning for Kenyatta indicates, this was much more a process of negotiation on both sides. There was no lack of interest in Kenya from the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and predecessors; nor was there a dictatorial neo-colonial control. Funeral planning was instead one of many aspects of a negotiation through which the relationship was pursued, reaffirmed and remade, to the mutual benefit of groups within both the British and Kenyan governments. Certainly, British officials promoted British models upon which to base the funeral proceedings, and British firms to implement these; yet they did so after being asked to provide this by Kenyan politicians pursuing their own agendas. Despite that Kenya's publicly stated foreign policy was 'positive non-alignment', in reality, Kenya remained Western-, and particularly British-oriented.<sup>13</sup> Although Britain's predominant position was challenged during the 1970s as others gained a larger economic stake in Kenya, it was not until after Kenyatta's death that the US signed a formal military agreement with Kenya.<sup>14</sup> Britain was one of Kenya's largest sources of foreign trade throughout this period, with Britain's aid programme to Kenya one of its largest in Africa.<sup>15</sup> In the military sphere, Britain remained among Kenya's major suppliers as well as offering training. Kenya had only two public defence agreements during Kenyatta's presidency: one with Ethiopia against possible Somali aggression, the other a 1964 Memorandum of Understanding with Britain, as well as a private Anglo-Kenyan understanding promising consultation over Somali

aggression.<sup>16</sup> The funeral assistance was thus situated in the context of a much broader military and economic relationship in which Kenyan politicians routinely looked towards Britain.

British pageantry and pomp, tradition and ritual have a long history, and are often acknowledged as something the British state does, and has historically done, well – and by which British officials and politicians have been more than a little obsessed.<sup>17</sup> Cannadine in particular has examined the role of ceremony within the British Empire; and Murphy has recently highlighted the monarchy's role in post-imperial British symbolism and ceremony.<sup>18</sup> State and royal funerals have long been important occasions in Britain. Churchill's state funeral in January 1965 (codenamed Operation Hope Not) was viewed worldwide and attended by global leaders and statesmen from 112 countries.<sup>19</sup> Studies of the 'invention of tradition' in Africa have tended to focus on the colonial era, and the devising of new rituals – both imperial and 'traditional' – at the start of the colonial period.<sup>20</sup> Yet there was also a significant creation of traditions at the other end of the colonial period, in the making of post-colonial states. A range of rituals and institutions were devised to legitimate newly independent states.<sup>21</sup> African nationalist parties had to create symbols, traditions of leadership and party structures; new forms of commemoration and celebration were required, such as Jamhuri Day and Kenyatta Day in Kenya. Yet Kenyatta's funeral showed that the influence of the outgoing metropole did not end with – a perfect example of this newly invented tradition – the lowering of the colonial flag and raising of its independent replacement.<sup>22</sup>

There is an extensive literature concerning death rituals and funerals in African states, recognising their significance as 'a contested space within which deeper struggles over state power and communal identity could be signified'.<sup>23</sup> But although Metcalf and Huntington have recognised that 'funerals of heads of state are often grand and highly politicized events', this literature has rarely focused on presidential funerals.<sup>24</sup> A key issue has been that of ethnicity, burial place and autochony.<sup>25</sup> In Kenya, this had been significant after the assassination of Tom Mboya in 1969, who, despite his reputation as a supra-ethnic leader, was buried at Rusinga Island and became 'in death what he had not been in life: an ethnic hero';<sup>26</sup> whilst after the death of SM Otieno this was the primary debate.<sup>27</sup> Yet with Kenyatta's death these questions did not seem to emerge: Kenyatta was the 'father of the nation' and, despite his clear Kikuyu base, he remained a national figure in death, buried in the capital Nairobi. Kenyatta's funeral was also unusual as it was not, as Jindra and Noret have argued African funerals often are, 'one of the key sites of the anthropological production of the image of "traditional" Africa'.<sup>28</sup> Rather, leading Kenyans self-consciously sought to portray an image not of 'tradition', but of a 'modern' nation-state following state funeral practices recognised by and imported from Britain.

### **Contingency Planning in 1968**

Despite British colonial anxieties about Kenya's independence and Kenyatta, the Anglo-Kenyan relationship by 1968 was close, and Kenyatta privileged within this.<sup>29</sup> In May 1968 Kenyatta suffered a stroke.<sup>30</sup> To put it bluntly, it was not predicted that Kenyatta would remain alive for long. Kenyatta never wanted to plan for his death; indeed, it was often one of the frustrations of British and Kenyan policymakers that he did not prepare for this by unreservedly nominating his successor.<sup>31</sup> Clearly in response to this, in June the British High Commission in Nairobi was approached by Bruce McKenzie to discuss arrangements for Kenyatta's death. McKenzie was the only European to be given a

ministerial position in Kenya at independence, and often acted as an intermediary between the Kenyan and British governments. The British High Commission considered him 'an influential friend at court'.<sup>32</sup>

At three initial, secret, consultations McKenzie and members of the British High Commission, including the High Commissioner, two First Secretaries and a Counsellor, together produced a list of questions to plan the President's funeral. This covered a range of specific details including the timing and location of the funeral, the coffin, transport, lying-in-state, guests, and burial.<sup>33</sup> McKenzie was concerned 'that adequate preparations should be made for a first class State Funeral which the world would expect on Kenyatta's death. If carried out efficiently and with dignity it will contribute to Kenya's prestige abroad and to political stability at home', goals shared by British policymakers.<sup>34</sup> In moving forward, McKenzie was to present this as his own work, and the British input was not to be revealed; there was evident concern that other Kenyans might be less positive about British involvement.<sup>35</sup> McKenzie took this initial list of questions to a meeting on 19 June 1968 with Vice-President Daniel arap Moi, Minister for Defence Njoroge Mungai, and Attorney-General Charles Njonjo (though Njonjo did not in fact attend).<sup>36</sup> Those invited were among the most prominent and powerful of Kenya's politicians, and their involvement, along with the secrecy surrounding the planning, shows the significance attached to these plans. These three were also key figures in the debate over the succession to the presidency, a critical issue in Kenyan politics, and one of great concern to British policymakers.<sup>37</sup> In the same month, Kenya's tenth constitutional amendment meant that the vice-president would succeed automatically for ninety days, marking Moi as constitutionally the most likely successor, but with Mungai always a potential contender. Thus, the High Commissioner noted that one of McKenzie's aims had been 'to establish Moi's confidence in Mungai, which hitherto had been sadly lacking. It seems that the two got on very well together on this occasion ... The omission of Mungai has always been a weakness in the system and this reconciliation is a valuable achievement'.<sup>38</sup> This planning thus had the additional aim of encouraging cooperation amongst Kenya's elite. At the first meeting, lasting 'nearly five hours', these men decided to formally request British assistance, all (excluding McKenzie) believing this was their first involvement.<sup>39</sup>

Having been asked to assist, the head of the East Africa Department (EAD) replied to the High Commissioner: 'we shall get to work here and give all the help we can'.<sup>40</sup> According to a British diplomat who acted as a 'liaison' on this, policy was to 'offer any advice which the Kenyans might request'.<sup>41</sup> At the simplest level, the British government was asked to provide details of the ceremonial of previous British state funerals, and these were obtained from the Lord Chamberlain's office.<sup>42</sup> The Commonwealth Office went further and began to draw the preparations into the specialized language and practice of British state funerals, suggesting that 'Ministry of Public Buildings and Works could probably supply design for catafalque and the firm of Garrards prepare depositum plate in advance'.<sup>43</sup> EAD also raised the possibility of using a gun carriage for the funeral.<sup>44</sup> Given that Kenya clearly did not own one, there must be some scepticism as to whether Kenyan planners would have seen a gun carriage as necessary had it not been posited as such by the British. EAD already seemed willing to consider arranging the loan of those items they considered essential to the funeral. The funeral was planned for St. Andrew's Presbyterian Kirk on the sixth day after Kenyatta's death.<sup>45</sup>

The High Commission also raised the possibility of preparing a coffin in Britain to be flown out with a team of morticians at the time of death.<sup>46</sup> The Commonwealth Office suggested the firm of JH Kenyon for the coffin and embalmer. The choice of this firm was an obvious one: they had been involved in many royal funerals, had embalmed King George VI and Churchill, and were experienced in repatriations of bodies from overseas.<sup>47</sup> The Lord Chamberlain's office introduced McKenzie to John Kenyon, Lieutenant Colonel Johnston of the Lord Chamberlain's office, and Newiss from the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works.<sup>48</sup> At the same time as being so involved in the behind the scenes planning of the funeral, however, Tallboys of the Commonwealth Office was keen to keep these introductions private. He argued that:

It would have been most unwise to run the unnecessary risk of having the "Royal undertaker" recognised arriving in Downing Street and attending a meeting at the Commonwealth Office at the same time as the well known Kenya Minister of Agriculture ... Once the Lord Chamberlain's office has given the necessary advice and made the essential introductions it would seem unnecessary, and perhaps undesirable, that we should continue to play an active role in the advance planning for the demise of their President<sup>49</sup>

Though he did not rule out 'further material assistance' or acting as a 'postbox',<sup>50</sup> it was clear that he was reluctant to lead, or be seen to lead, this process.

From within Kenya, another Briton was heavily involved in the 1968 planning. Colonel Anderson was Chief of Defence Staff of the Kenyan army and the highest-ranking British serviceman in Kenya at this time, with his promotion being arranged to Brigadier and 'Commander, British Services Training teams and Adviser to the Minister for Defence, Kenya' in order to enhance and maintain the strong British military advisory presence in Kenya.<sup>51</sup> Anderson wrote to Kenyons in October 1968 with the specifics for the coffin. 'The Casket is to be made of Meru Oak – of the ASTON design and should have silver oxydised handles and embellishments and be zinc lined'; a vault and death mask of the President were also requested.<sup>52</sup> This was all to be prepared immediately; Kenyatta's coffin was to be made in Britain and wait for him. As well as the coffin, there was also a question of morticians: 'It is understood that you would need four people to fly to Kenya – a director, embalmer, mask maker and one man to train the bearer party'. A British embalmer from Kenyons was requested to 'hold himself in readiness to fly to Kenya on the first available 'plane' and a list of flights departing each day from capitals around Europe was attached.<sup>53</sup> The plan was set for death at any moment.

### **A decade of waiting: 1968-78**

Kenyatta proved more robust than anticipated, but during the following decade speculation on his death was rife, with the presidential succession one of the foremost political issues. This period witnessed Britain's withdrawal from east of Suez and entry into the European Economic Community – apparent evidence of post-imperial decline.<sup>54</sup> Yet while the anticipated future funeral of an African president was not a pressing concern for most of the FCO, relations with Kenya remained significant and within EAD the funeral was not forgotten, though British involvement in planning became more sporadic and was not a continuing focus of interaction with members of the Kenyan government. For example, condolence letters from the Prime Minister, Queen, and FCO were prepared and occasionally revised, ready to send upon the President's death.<sup>55</sup>

In July 1972 the High Commission reported having 'searched our Top Secret files recently ... [for] a check list of actions which we might have to take' at the time of Kenyatta's death – which they could not find.<sup>56</sup> As a result, from at least 1973 there was a firm plan in EAD for the action to be taken upon news of Kenyatta's death, including informing various departments within the FCO, notifying the undertakers, giving details to those who would likely wish to attend the funeral, sending condolence messages and signing the condolence book.<sup>57</sup> EAD recorded that the embalmer from Kenyons was 'fully briefed and ready to move'.<sup>58</sup> In 1973, the High Commission was concerned that there were gaps in their knowledge of the planning. Their main concern was the idea of 'a series of code words' to indicate various scenarios about the President's health, which could be used to direct information from the High Commission to the FCO and then to the firm of Kenyons ready to fly out with the coffin.<sup>59</sup> The suggestion had apparently been mooted in 1968 but the High Commission returned to it in 1973, unsure whether this had in fact been instituted, and thinking that 'the idea still seems a good one'.<sup>60</sup> FCO decided, however, that this 'would only serve to complicate matters', as there were only two possible situations: when the President died, which would be public knowledge, and if this was 'imminent', when they could alert the embalmer to be ready to leave.<sup>61</sup> The idea of creating code words is symptomatic of the semi-clandestine nature of these preparations, as well as showing that the performance of procedure was important even internally within the British government.

Royal attendance at the funeral was discussed from 1970, when it emerged as a dispute, albeit a reasonably minor one, between the FCO and the Protocol and Conference Department. The position agreed in 1963 had been that the High Commissioner would be the Queen's representative at the funeral.<sup>62</sup> In 1970 EAD regarded this as unacceptable and wanted representation at a much more senior level: Prince Philip or Prince Charles were recommended.<sup>63</sup> As the Queen herself would not attend, this was the highest possible level of royal representation. Murphy has described the decisions surrounding royal attendance at independence celebrations, with higher ranking royals attending the most important ceremonies, and many of the same attitudes and assumptions seem to have prevailed in the debate over which member of the royal family would attend the funeral of Kenyatta.<sup>64</sup>

The staff of EAD viewed the monarchy as an instrument of British policy. They also, no doubt, saw the occasion of the funeral as the opportunity for some bureaucratic one-upmanship, a royal assertion of the importance of the part of the world with which they dealt. The Palace was more cautious, raising concerns 'that representation of The Queen by a member of the Royal Family on that occasion would create a precedent' of royal attendance at funerals of Commonwealth Heads of State, which they were disinclined to make.<sup>65</sup> Le Tocq, head of EAD, argued in his reply that 'British interests in Kenya would suffer a severe blow if British representation ... is not at an appropriate level'.<sup>66</sup> He was keen to highlight Kenya's significance to those who would ultimately make the decision. EAD thus stressed that this kind of precedent would not be created, suggesting five reasons which meant Kenyatta's case merited 'exceptional treatment':

- i. President Kenyatta's high place in the history of the development of new nation states in Africa.
- ii. His very exceptional and close relationship with this country through bad and good days over many years.
- iii. His unusually advanced age.

- iv. His stature as an African, and indeed perhaps world, figure.
- v. His position as the founder of Independent Kenya and the fact that he has been President of a major ex-British African State for longer than any other one.<sup>67</sup>

The first point on this list was crucial: observers often viewed Kenya as a rare success in Africa and this was widely attributed to Kenyatta personally.<sup>68</sup> A handwritten minute suggested the few who would qualify for this level of representation: Nehru, Haile Selassie, Kenyatta and Menzies.<sup>69</sup> (Indeed, EAD was concurrently considering representation and condolence letters for the funeral of Haile Selassie.<sup>70</sup>) The brevity of this list suggests the significance EAD attributed to Britain's relationship with Kenya, and more particularly with Kenyatta himself. The Palace agreed that either Prince Charles or Prince Philip would attend the funeral, and this was welcomed in the FCO as a symbol of the importance which British politicians and the Crown attached to Kenya.<sup>71</sup>

### **After-Death: 1978**

By 1978, EAD's previously positive views of Kenyatta were shifting as he grew older and increasingly inept. EAD had also come to favour Moi as presidential successor.<sup>72</sup> Moi had the support of several leading Kenyans British diplomats considered their allies, notably Njonjo, Minister for Finance Mwai Kibaki, and McKenzie until his assassination by a bomb in 1978. British policymakers thus expected Moi to prove most beneficial for British interests. On 22 August 1978, President Kenyatta died in Mombasa. Kenyatta's death meant the climax of the succession struggle. The funeral was drawn into a process – part planned, part *ad hoc* – through which Moi and his supporters moved rapidly to install and confirm Moi in power. According to Karimi and Ochieng, Mungai, Moi's main rival in the succession, had planned a purge of the Moi faction to be executed upon Kenyatta's death, but was taken by surprise by Kenyatta dying in Mombasa rather than Nakuru, and Moi's supporters acted immediately to propel him to power.<sup>73</sup> It is unclear quite how exaggerated some of these retrospective accounts may have been, but there clearly were plots against Moi. In organising a successful and elaborate funeral, Moi was showing his statesmanship and ability to act in a Presidential capacity as the stability and prestige of the new Kenyan leadership was being proved: 'the political wake is also a political baptism'.<sup>74</sup> The funeral was a demonstration of a stable transfer of power, aimed at a national and international audience, and British officials were happy to cooperate, favouring stability which would protect their interests. Tamarkin has argued that Kenya's 'transition seemed a well-planned, well-rehearsed and magnificently orchestrated operation'.<sup>75</sup> The funeral helped to establish this impression.

In the days immediately following Kenyatta's death, EAD engaged in a flurry of activity, with multiple urgent telegrams sent between EAD and the High Commission, as well as communications with Kenyan politicians and debate within the FCO.<sup>76</sup> The prepared condolence letters were sent. The major change from the drafts was the decision that the Prime Minister would address Moi as 'Mr. President' rather than 'Mr. Acting President' as planned.<sup>77</sup> This was a reaction to the way the succession struggle was playing out in Kenya. Moi had been sworn in as President rather than Acting President under the constitution's provision for a ninety day interim in which the vice-president would succeed automatically. The semantic distinction was evidently considered important: the High Commission sent back the signed copy of the letter for the Prime Minister to re-issue.<sup>78</sup> The FCO had long predicted potential violence and instability after Kenyatta's death, but the immediate reaction

in Kenya was described as 'stunned calm', with growing optimism in the High Commission as the situation remained stable.<sup>79</sup>

However carefully earlier plans had been laid in London, events after Kenyatta's death saw a degree of muddle and improvisation which suggests that the earlier funeral plans were not widely known within the Kenyan government, and hints at the endemic fractiousness of the Kenyan state, as well as a certain lack of coordination in London. Yet despite forgetting previous plans, Kenyan policymakers turned once again to the British government. In the event, instead of the British contacting and sending the firm of Kenyons, which had prepared a coffin and planned to send an embalmer, a new arrangement was made which once more involved the British. Rather than going through the planned and official channels, this highlighted the importance of informal personal connections: the man approached, Frank Clayton, had been 'superintendent of eight cemeteries in Nairobi for 20 years' until 1968 and was thus known by the mortuary keeper who contacted him.<sup>80</sup> As Clayton was not himself an embalmer, he turned to a colleague, Allan Sinclair, to assist. Sinclair recalled, 'When I was first contacted I didn't even have a passport', showing just how unprepared he was when asked to act as the embalmer, and he arranged for a coffin to be made and transported from Britain, unaware of any previous plans.<sup>81</sup> Sinclair's manager reported in the press that 'At first I thought it was a joke', whilst the High Commissioner was expecting someone from the firm of Kenyons to arrive.<sup>82</sup> This still resulted in two British morticians departing for Kenya and embalming Kenyatta's body; however, rather than the implementation of a master plan, this was the result of a rapid process of improvisation and personal connections.

In the days between Kenyatta's death and funeral, the British government were further consulted on additional aspects of the ceremonial. On the day of Kenyatta's death, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) were asked for advice on the British model for lying in state.<sup>83</sup> This information was duly provided by Major Mather, who had had this role at Churchill's funeral, and who stayed up all night to write his four-page telegram dictating the British forms of ceremonial. He included information on the positioning of guards, their relief and rest patterns, transportation and visitation, with sixteen officers on duty at any time.<sup>84</sup> This extraordinary level of detail evidenced the British concern for ceremonial, ritual and procedure. This was sent to Brigadier Cromwell Mkungusi, who would in 1983 become Chief of Staff of Kenya's Armed Forces, highlighting the continuing post-colonial connections between the British and Kenyan militaries.<sup>85</sup>

The Kenyans also requested more tangible assistance from the British military:

the loan of a gun carriage – which of course consists of a gun and a limber – 50 rounds of blank ammunition and a small team of five men which would be required to advise on the ceremonial and to train the detachments of Kenyans who would escort the gun carriage<sup>86</sup>

As Britain was a major military supplier to Kenya, it made sense for the Kenyan military to turn to the British MOD, where they already had links and connections, to request this equipment. All of these requests were granted with a minimum of dispute or even discussion. The five soldiers who were to accompany the gun carriage were led by Mather, though FCO were anxious that the British role should not be too public and Mather should play only a 'low key advisory role ... We are particularly concerned not to be seen quote running unquote the Kenyans' arrangements'.<sup>87</sup> This echoes the concern expressed by Tallboys in 1968 that Britain should not be seen to be leading the arrangements; although willing to use this opportunity to assert their role as patrons and mentors to



the Kenyan government, British officials were very aware of the dangers of being publicly seen to be too controlling.

For the FCO, the potentially problematic request was the fifty rounds of blank ammunition which would be necessary to follow the 'detailed instructions for firing 21 gun salute' which had been asked for by the Kenyan government and provided.<sup>88</sup> Sending ammunition – even blank – required overflight clearance, and with two possible routes, this necessitated permission from nine countries.<sup>89</sup> The Secretary of EAD afterwards 'confess[ed] to momentary concern when we were told of the need for overflying clearances, irrational though such concern was given the nature of the cargo'.<sup>90</sup> It was unlikely that this would be refused, but FCO's rush to arrange this was partly an attempt to remedy the damage caused to Britain's reputation in Kenya as a military supplier following the Entebbe raid in 1976. Then, the Kenyan government had urgently requested ammunition against the rumoured threat of Ugandan invasion, but the British had been unable to supply it quickly because of overflight clearance refusals.<sup>91</sup> This time, there were no such problems and all requests were delivered.

The funeral offered a focus for a pro-Moi faction to assert their dominance in a manner that emphasised continuity. The first cabinet meetings under Moi's leadership concerned funeral arrangements, and a State Funeral Steering Committee was set up.<sup>92</sup> It included Moi, Minister of Defence Muchemi and Minister for Foreign Affairs Munyua Waiyaki who was 'responsible for arrangements for external representation at funeral'.<sup>93</sup> Involved from the military were Army Commander General Mulinge, Chief of Defence Staff Brigadier Kakenyi, and permanent secretary Kiereini. At this moment of transition, the military had the potential to challenge Moi, but the funeral offered him the chance to immediately work with key figures within it as their new Commander-in-Chief. It was not long before Moi was receiving multiple declarations of support, including from erstwhile rivals.<sup>94</sup>

Internally within the British government, a crucial question was about governmental representation. Berridge has argued that 'working funerals' have been used since the 1960s 'to conduct diplomatic business', and that the level of representation was a means of 'diplomatic signalling' about the relationships being sought and publicly promoted.<sup>95</sup> That a senior government figure should attend had already been decided.<sup>96</sup> An immediate concern after hearing of the death was to assess the foreign representation at the funeral, with telegrams sent to probe the level of representation expected from other governments.<sup>97</sup> EAD argued that 'Given the closeness of our relations with Kenya we can expect the Kenyans to pay particular attention to the level at which we are represented', and thought a Cabinet Minister most appropriate; the Prime Minister considered attending, and quickly the Foreign Secretary 'confirmed his wish to attend'.<sup>98</sup> In the event, the official British party consisted of The Prince of Wales, Foreign Secretary David Owen, Lord Carrington representing the Opposition, and former Governor and High Commissioner Malcolm MacDonald.<sup>99</sup> Both Owen and Prince Charles met individually with Moi.<sup>100</sup> The British representation was of a relatively high level amongst the multiple foreign delegations – the nature of which was, symptomatically, monitored in assiduous detail by British diplomats.<sup>101</sup>

The service arranged by the Kenyan government occurred on the tenth day after death in the grounds of Parliament House; again this was not what had been planned a decade earlier.<sup>102</sup> Comparing the opening address from the funeral orders of service of Churchill and Kenyatta

demonstrates clear funerary plagiarism. Given that Kenyan policymakers had asked to receive programmes from Churchill's funeral, it appears that those organising the President's funeral lifted the text almost entirely, editing only slight details. Much of the service differed, but there were several other similarities, including one of the hymns, the National Anthem, Last Post, Reveille and air force fly past.

... the burial of a great man who has rendered memorable service to his country and to the cause of freedom. We shall think of him with thanksgiving that he was raised up in our days of desperate need to be a leader and inspirer of the nation, for his dauntless resolution and untiring vigilance and for his example of courage and endurance. We shall commit his soul into the hands of God, the merciful Judge of all men and the giver of eternal life, praying that the memory of his virtues and his achievements may remain as a part of our national heritage, inspiring generations to come to emulate his magnanimity and patriotic devotion ...<sup>103</sup>

... the burial of great son of Africa who has rendered memorable service to his country and the Continent of Africa in the struggle for freedom and human dignity. We shall think of him with thanksgiving, that he was raised up in our days of desperate need, to be a leader and inspirer of the nation. For his dauntless resolution and untiring vigilance, and for his example of courage, endurance and forgiveness, we give thanks to God. We shall commit his soul into the hands of God, the merciful Judge of all men and the giver of eternal life, praying that the memory of his virtues and his achievements, may remain as a part of our national heritage, inspiring generations to come to emulate his magnanimity and patriotic devotion ...<sup>104</sup>

Thus, although the focus on ceremony did reveal a British obsession, the demand for ceremonial display was one shared by at least some leading Kenyans. This was not just shown on the occasion of the funeral; as one example, Kenyatta Day in 1970 had a similarly designed 'souvenir programme' to Kenyatta's memorial programme, with a detailed programme of events including a parade and flypast by the Kenya Air Force.<sup>105</sup> The funeral was also not the only occasion upon which Moi and the British government collaborated in a ceremonial display: on 12-14 June 1979 Moi paid a State Visit to Britain, an invitation he was recorded as being 'obviously delighted' to receive, and at which he was treated in 'elaborate ceremonial manner'.<sup>106</sup> Although much of the British funeral involvement was private, that which was public – such as the attendance and gun carriage loan – was widely reported and visibly demonstrated British support for the new Kenyan regime, as well as for the deceased Kenyatta. Moi used Kenyan ideas about widespread British influence to his advantage in highlighting his support from Britain – which British officials were willing to provide as they saw their interests protected. In helping to plan the funeral, British policymakers were thus consolidating their ties to the Kenya government, whilst Moi and those around him reaffirmed their connection to Britain.

After the funeral, the British involved were self-congratulatory about their handling of the arrangements. The High Commissioner wrote that 'Britain gained a lot of kudos from this assistance, willingly given';<sup>107</sup> whilst 'It was a matter of great satisfaction to President Moi, to members of the late President's family and to Kenyans generally' that Prince Charles had attended.<sup>108</sup> After the

funeral, the High Commission received a letter from Kiereini: 'On behalf of the Kenya Government, and as a member of State Funeral Steering Committee, I take this opportunity to thank your Government for the assistance given to us'.<sup>109</sup> The British government had aimed to foster relations with their Kenyan counterparts, particularly the new Kenyan President, and believed they had successfully done so.

Yet even within the British government there was a lack of coordination, with multiple channels of communication. In the months that followed the funeral a dispute emerged between EAD and MOD concerning who would pay the costs surrounding the loan of the gun carriage. The request had gone from the Kenyan Minister of Defence, Muchemi, through the British High Commission's Defence Advisor to the British MOD, rather than through the FCO in the first instance, to the annoyance of EAD.<sup>110</sup> The MOD requested reimbursement for 'other incidental expenses', giving the concession of asking for 'extra costs', and estimating this bill at £500.<sup>111</sup> EAD officials wanted to 'resist strongly', and argued for MOD to pay some of the costs.<sup>112</sup> This concern over a really very small amount of money suggests that the amount mattered less than the principle of not being asked beforehand. This inter-departmental bickering is revealing, with EAD criticising that MOD 'seem to operate without a great deal of coordination, and ... seem to take actions without considering who is going to pay'.<sup>113</sup> MOD argued that 'our only alternative would be to request payment from the Kenyan authorities', but for EAD, despite their dislike of being forced to pay this additional and unexpected, albeit small, expense, the relationship with the new Moi Presidency and the goodwill generated by the funeral was far more significant than any departmental dispute.<sup>114</sup> Eventually, MOD reduced the figure to £184 and FCO offered £84.<sup>115</sup> This provides an interesting ending to the story of British involvement in the funeral: though keen to get involved, EAD felt themselves more alive to the political complexities, and were concerned not to be seen as leading this process. The military, by contrast, enjoyed ritual and had no hesitation in getting involved immediately, seemingly without consideration of costs and consequences.

## **Conclusion**

The detail of Britain's involvement in planning President Kenyatta's funeral indicates something of the nature of the post-colonial Anglo-Kenyan relationship as policymakers from both countries aimed to continue this. The formal end of colonialism was not the end of British involvement and interest in former colonies. Ceremonial occasions, such as Kenyatta's funeral, offered an opportunity for the British state to display this publicly. The monarchy was an essential policy tool for those in the FCO as a means of symbolising the value they attached to such relationships. The Royal Family had a key role in the post-war Commonwealth in demonstrating the importance of connections with former colonies.

The literature has suggested a shift in Kenyan politics over the period covered by this article: from a nationalist, nation-building and development-focused phase in the 1960s to a less optimistic 1970s of economic crisis.<sup>116</sup> Kenyatta's funeral planning, however, suggests a more limited change in the way key individuals in Kenya related to their British counterparts, and vice versa. In the late 1970s Moi and his allies still turned to the British, masters of ceremonial, to assist with preparations; British diplomats and soldiers barely hesitated in their acceptance of this role. Multiple personal and institutional ties led Kenyans to turn to Britain in 1978, despite that the 'plan' made a decade earlier had been known of by few and mostly forgotten. The relationship was complex, involving

connections at varying levels within government, and shows the importance of examining bilateral relationships at a nuanced and detailed level. Groups and individuals pursued their own, sometimes conflicting or contradictory, agendas; yet often, as in the case of Kenyatta's funeral, agendas could coincide. Below the top level of government, multiple contacts and individuals relationships sustained this diplomacy. Part of the strategy decided upon by Kenya's incoming leaders in the early 1960s had been to accept and take over an established administrative and economic system rather than change it, and to maintain a close relationship with the British government and military.<sup>117</sup> The planning for, and performance of, Kenyatta's funeral reveals the continuing negotiations which underlay the relationship; as the High Commissioner's 1978 Annual Review put it: 'President Moi and his leading associates made it clear that they still regard Britain as Kenya's best friend'.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1978. 'Kenyatta funeral: At the funeral of'. *The Times*, 1 September.

<sup>2</sup> S.J.G. Fingland to P. Rosling, 19 September 1978, FCO 31/2319/206, The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA).

<sup>3</sup> Charles Harrison. 1978. 'Kenyatta mourners throng into Nairobi'. *The Times*, 30 August.

<sup>4</sup> 'Jomo Kenyatta. Statement by His Excellency the Governor', 9 May 1960, FCO 141/6769/66, TNA.

<sup>5</sup> Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya*, 17-8.

<sup>6</sup> Chikeka, *New African States*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Burton and Jennings, 'Emperor's New Clothes?', 16.

<sup>8</sup> Burton and Jennings, 'Emperor's New Clothes?', 1-25; Branch and Cheeseman, 'Bureaucratic-Executive State', 11-31; Fahnbulleh, 'Economic Development', 33-47; Cheeseman, 'Political Linkage', 3-24.

<sup>9</sup> See Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Parsons, *1964 Army Mutinies*.

<sup>10</sup> An exception is Clapham, 'Bilateral Relations: Ghana', and 'Bilateral Relations: Ethiopia', 252-261.

<sup>11</sup> Northedge, *Descent from Power*, 206.

<sup>12</sup> Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Statement by Joseph Murumbi, Nineteenth regular session of the United Nations General Assembly, AE/3/274, Kenya National Archives, Nairobi (hereafter KNA).

<sup>14</sup> Hornsby, *Kenya*, 337.

<sup>15</sup> H.C. Byatt to Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 9 January 1978, FCO 31/2320/6, TNA.

<sup>16</sup> 'Agreement of Cooperation and Mutual Defence Assistance between the Imperial Ethiopian Government and the Government of Kenya', DO 213/129/25; 'Memorandum of Intention and Understanding regarding certain Financial and Defence Matters of Mutual Interest to the British and Kenya Governments', 3 June 1964, DO 213/136/1; telegram no. 374, Commonwealth Office to Nairobi, 23 January 1967, FCO 16/115/41, TNA.

<sup>17</sup> Cannadine, 'Meaning of ritual', 136-161.

<sup>18</sup> Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*; Murphy, *Monarchy and the End of Empire*.

<sup>19</sup> Ramsden, *Man of the Century*, 13-16.

<sup>20</sup> See Ranger, 'Invention of tradition', 211-262; Spear, 'Limits of invention', 3-27.

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- <sup>21</sup> Ng'weno suggests the importance to Kenyatta of the national flag, having chosen the colours for it himself: Ng'weno, *The Day Kenyatta Died*, 17.
- <sup>22</sup> The ritual of independence ceremonies is described in Cannadine, 'Independence Day Ceremonials', 1-17.
- <sup>23</sup> Lee and Vaughan, 'Death and Dying', 345. Regarding Kenya see also Lamont, 'Decomposing Pollution?', 88-108; Droz, 'Transformations of Death', 69-87; Kisiara, 'Luo Funerals', 127-136.
- <sup>24</sup> Metcalf and Huntington, *Celebrations of Death*, 134.
- <sup>25</sup> Geschiere, *Perils of Belonging*, 55-7.
- <sup>26</sup> Goldsworthy, 'Ethnicity and Leadership', 120.
- <sup>27</sup> Cohen and Odhiambo, *Burying SM*.
- <sup>28</sup> Jindra and Noret, 'Funerals in Africa', 6.
- <sup>29</sup> E.G. Norris to Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 27 January 1969, FCO 31/353/1, TNA.
- <sup>30</sup> Branch, *Kenya*, 67.
- <sup>31</sup> Sylla, 'Succession of the Charismatic Leader', 20.
- <sup>32</sup> Eric Norris to Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 12 January 1971, FCO 31/851/1, TNA.
- <sup>33</sup> 'Contingency Plan for Arrangements in the Event of the President's Serious Illness or Death'. Annex A: 'Problems Connected with the State Funeral in the Event of the Death of HE The President of Kenya', FCO 31/213/1, TNA.
- <sup>34</sup> Bruce Greatbatch to Michael Scott, 19 June 1968, FCO 31/213/1, TNA.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Bruce Greatbatch to Michael Scott, 26 June 1968, FCO 31/213/2, TNA.
- <sup>37</sup> Tamarkin, 'Kenyatta to Moi', 22.
- <sup>38</sup> Bruce Greatbatch to Michael Scott, 26 June 1968, FCO 31/213/2, TNA.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> M. Scott to B. Greatbatch, 6 June 1968, FCO 31/210/34, TNA.
- <sup>41</sup> De Courcy Ling, *Empires Rise and Sink*, 74.
- <sup>42</sup> Telegram no. 2478, Nairobi to Commonwealth Office, 15 July 1968, FCO 31/213/3; telegram no. 2274, Commonwealth Office to Nairobi, 19 July 1968, FCO 31/213/7, TNA.
- <sup>43</sup> Telegram no. 2274, Commonwealth Office to Nairobi, 19 July 1968, FCO 31/213/7, TNA.
- <sup>44</sup> 'Contingency Plan for Arrangements in the Event of the President's Serious Illness or Death', June 1968, FCO 31/213/1, TNA.
- <sup>45</sup> Telegram no. 2478, Nairobi to Commonwealth Office, 15 July 1968, FCO 31/213/3, TNA.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>47</sup> Parsons, *J H Kenyon*, 32-3.
- <sup>48</sup> R.G. Tallboys to J. de C. Ling, 9 August 1968, FCO 31/213/14, TNA.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> R.B. Penfold, 'The Amalgamation of the RN, RAF and Army Training Teams in Kenya under one Overall Commander', August 1968, DEFE 24/660/E112, TNA.
- <sup>52</sup> Colonel J.R. Anderson to J. and H. Kenyon, October 1968, FCO 31/213/25, TNA.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Northedge, *Descent from Power*, 226-9.
- <sup>55</sup> Condolence Letters, FCO 31/850/1, FCO 31/600/6, FCO 31/1496/12, TNA.
- <sup>56</sup> T.J. Bellers to J.G. Wallace, 27 July 1972, FCO 31/1189/6, TNA.
- <sup>57</sup> 'Action required on President Kenyatta's death', 8 June 1973, FCO 31/1496/12, TNA.
- <sup>58</sup> M.K. Ewans to Resident Clerk, 8 June 1973, FCO 31/1496/13, TNA.
- <sup>59</sup> B.T. Holmes to R.W. Whitney, 10 May 1973, FCO 31/1496/11, TNA.

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- <sup>60</sup> B.T. Holmes to R.W. Whitney, 7 March 1973, FCO 31/1496/1, TNA.
- <sup>61</sup> B.T. Holmes to R.W. Whitney, 10 May 1973, FCO 31/1496/11, TNA.
- <sup>62</sup> A.L. Mayall to Purcell, 9 December 1970, FCO 31/600/8, TNA.
- <sup>63</sup> R.M. Purcell to T.G. Bellers, 24 November 1970, FCO 31/600/9, TNA.
- <sup>64</sup> Murphy, 'Independence Day', 21.
- <sup>65</sup> J.A.N. Graham to EAD, 26 February 1971, FCO 31/850/5, TNA.
- <sup>66</sup> E.G. Le Tocq to Sir J. Johnston, 17 February 1971, FCO 31/850/6, TNA.
- <sup>67</sup> R.M. Purcell to Le Tocq, 8 March 1971, FCO 31/850/9, TNA.
- <sup>68</sup> Throup, 'Kenyatta State', 33.
- <sup>69</sup> R.M. Purcell to Le Tocq, 8 March 1971, FCO 31/850/9, TNA.
- <sup>70</sup> Alan Campbell to E.G. Le Tocq, 17 February 1971, FCO 31/802/1; E.G. Le Tocq to Smedley, 6 April 1971, FCO 31/802/7, TNA.
- <sup>71</sup> Sir Martin Charteris to Roger du Boulay, 16 April 1977, FCO 31/2315/6, TNA.
- <sup>72</sup> Briefs for the Visit of Vice-President Moi of Kenya 5-8 March 1978, FCO 31/2334, TNA.
- <sup>73</sup> Karimi and Ochieng, *The Kenyatta Succession*, 157-72.
- <sup>74</sup> Berridge, 'Diplomacy after Death', 226.
- <sup>75</sup> Tamarkin, 'Kenyatta to Moi', 30. See also Khapoya, 'Politics of Succession', 7-20.
- <sup>76</sup> The aftermath of Kenyatta's death is covered in FCO 31/2315-2319, TNA.
- <sup>77</sup> Nick Sanders to Margaret Turner, 23 August 1978, FCO 31/2315/35, TNA.
- <sup>78</sup> Telegram no. 1768, Crabbie to Carter, FCO 31/2316/134, TNA.
- <sup>79</sup> P.E. Rosling to Stratton, 23 August 1978, FCO 31/2315/31; telegram no. 1767, High Commission to Deskby, 25 August 1978, FCO 31/2316/112, TNA.
- <sup>80</sup> 1978. 'Reading Undertaker takes charge at Kenyatta's funeral', *Reading Chronicle*, 25 August, MSS/29/122, KNA.
- <sup>81</sup> Allan Sinclair, interview by author. Orpington, 31 October 2012.
- <sup>82</sup> 1978. 'Embalmer on urgent mission to Kenya'. *Surrey Comet*, 26 August, MSS/29/122, KNA; Sinclair interview.
- <sup>83</sup> Telegram no. 462, FCO to Nairobi, 22 August 1978, FCO 31/2315/14, TNA.
- <sup>84</sup> MOD to FCO, FCO 31/2315/25, TNA.
- <sup>85</sup> Hornsby, *Kenya*, 336.
- <sup>86</sup> B.H. Cousins to PS/Minister of State, 25 August 1978, FCO 31/2318/173, TNA.
- <sup>87</sup> Telegram no. 466, FCO to Nairobi, 23 August 1978, FCO 31/2315/36, TNA.
- <sup>88</sup> COMMCEN HSP to MOD, 24 August, FCO 31/2316/64, TNA.
- <sup>89</sup> Telegram no. 472, FCO to Nairobi, 24 August 1978, FCO 31/2316/70, TNA.
- <sup>90</sup> P. Rosling to S.J.G. Fingland, 12 September 1978, FCO 31/2319/198, TNA.
- <sup>91</sup> Telegram no. 1760, Nairobi to FCO, 24 August 1978, FCO 31/2316/71, TNA.
- <sup>92</sup> Ng'weno, *The Day Kenyatta Died*, 62-3.
- <sup>93</sup> Telegram no. 1755, Nairobi to FCO, 24 August 1978, FCO 31/2315/53, TNA.
- <sup>94</sup> C.D. Crabbie to FCO, 11 September 1978, FCO 31/2323/53, TNA.
- <sup>95</sup> Berridge, 'Funeral Summits', 107-15.
- <sup>96</sup> W.K. Prendergast to P.R.H. Wright, 12 April 1977, FCO 31/2315/59, TNA.
- <sup>97</sup> Telegram no. 2037, FCO to Washington, Bonn, Paris, Ottawa, Dar es Salaam, Khartoum, Lagos, Lusaka, Delhi, Gaborone, Nairobi, FCO 31/2315/24, TNA.
- <sup>98</sup> P.E. Rosling to Stratton, 24 August 1978, FCO 31/2315/59, TNA.
- <sup>99</sup> Telegram no. 478, FCO to Nairobi, 25 August 1978, FCO 31/2316/106, TNA.
- <sup>100</sup> Telegram no. 1770, Nairobi to FCO, FCO 31/2316/139, TNA.
- <sup>101</sup> 'Main Foreign Representatives at President Kenyatta's Funeral', FCO 31/2319/196, TNA.
- <sup>102</sup> Telegram no. 1755, Nairobi to FCO, 24 August 1978, FCO 31/2315/53, TNA.

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- <sup>103</sup> Lord Chancellor's Programme, Sir Winston Churchill Funeral Arrangements, LCO 2/6945, TNA.
- <sup>104</sup> Memorial Programme, The State Funeral for His Excellency the Late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, FCO 31/2318/193, TNA.
- <sup>105</sup> Souvenir programme: Kenyatta Day, 20 October 1970, FCO 31/601/2, TNA.
- <sup>106</sup> Telegram no. 94, High Commission to FCO, 16 February 1979, FCO 31/2564/32, TNA; S.J.W. Musandu, 'The President Abroad 1978-1980: President Moi's State Visit to Britain 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> June 1979', AHC/18/8, KNA.
- <sup>107</sup> S.J.G. Fingland to A.G. Munro, FCO 31/2319/202, TNA.
- <sup>108</sup> Stanley Fingland, 'The Death and Funeral of President Kenyatta', 6 September 1978, FCO 31/2319/196, TNA.
- <sup>109</sup> J.G. Kiereini to S.J.G. Fingland, 7 September 1978, FCO 31/2319/202A, TNA.
- <sup>110</sup> P. Rosling to Mellor, 1 September 1978, FCO 31/2319/194, TNA.
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- <sup>112</sup> P. Rosling to Mellor, 1 September 1978, FCO 31/2319/194, TNA.
- <sup>113</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>114</sup> Major D.M. Parkinson, to D. Carter, 19 September 1978, FCO 31/2319/205, TNA.
- <sup>115</sup> Major D.M. Parkinson to P.E. Rosling, 27 November 1978, FCO 31/2319/219; Plater to Longrigg, 22 December 1978, FCO 31/2319/221, TNA.
- <sup>116</sup> Cooper, *Africa since 1940*, 105-118.
- <sup>117</sup> See Cheeseman, 'Political Linkage', 3-24.
- <sup>118</sup> S.J.G. Fingland to Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 22 January 1979, FCO 31/2556/2, TNA.

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