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“A Federal Army for East Africa”: Late Colonial Visions for the Future of the King’s African Rifles and East African Federation

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Abstract

For a brief moment in the late-1950s, British policymakers and key African politicians shared a vision: an East African Federation of Kenya, Tanganyika, and Uganda. For British officials, one of the leading advantages would be transforming the colonial King’s African Rifles into a federal army. This aspect of the plans has rarely been recognised, but this article shows that British planning for the KAR became inextricably intertwined with federal thinking. Late colonialism was a time of alternative federal visions in addition to increased interventionism as British officials foresaw the end of colonial rule and sought to remake African institutions. A federal army was a key aim in such plans. This article argues that although no federation or federal army came into being, planning for them substantively shaped the military inheritance of the region at independence. Uganda and Tanganyika achieved independence with armies that were not fully autonomous, while Kenya took most of the shared colonial facilities. Thus, the article highlights the impact late colonial plans could have even when these did not come to fruition.

Keywords: East African Federation; King’s African Rifles; late colonialism; decolonisation; Julius Nyerere

During the period of late colonialism, British officials and African politicians envisaged ways to refashion African futures. From the British perspective, these attempts took the form of more interventionist policies of development; efforts to establish multiracial polities and federations; and a myriad of new constitutions, commissions, and white papers.¹ For African politicians, visions for the future could include Pan-Africanism, federations, and forms of “anticolonial modernity.”² As Frederick Cooper has shown, late colonialism was a time of “multiple possibilities.”³ One such vision for the future, favoured for a short time by both British policymakers and key African politicians, was the creation of an East African Federation, comprising the British colonies of Kenya, Tanganyika, and Uganda. In 1960, Julius Nyerere, Chief Minister of Tanganyika, famously declared that in order to achieve a federation he “would be prepared to postpone the celebration of

¹ John Darwin, “What Was the Late Colonial State?” *Itinerario* 23:3–4, (1999), 73–82.

² Frank Gerits, *The Ideological Scramble for Africa: How the Pursuit of Anticolonial Modernity Shaped a Postcolonial Order, 1945–1966* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2023), 5.

³ Frederick Cooper, “Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective,” *Journal of African History* 49: 2 (2008), 196.

Tanganyika's independence for a few months and celebrate East Africa's independence in 1962."⁴ Rather more expressively, one British civil servant wrote in January 1961 that "I am certain that Federation is the master stroke and the Santa Claus for bringing benefits to East Africa."⁵

For colonial officials, the appeal of an East African Federation was enhanced by their vision for the military. British planners hoped to transform the colonial army, the King's African Rifles (KAR), into "a Federal Army for East Africa."⁶ The KAR had covered the three territories since its inception in 1902 (initially also including Northern Rhodesia). Although each colony had its own battalions, there was one command structure, askaris (soldiers) served across the territories, and facilities, training, and equipment were shared.⁷ A joint federal army would thus be stronger, larger, and entail much less change than if the KAR was divided into three national armies.

Yet the KAR has rarely been recognised as a factor in British hopes for federation. Significant new research on a possible East African Federation by both Christopher Vaughan and Kevin P. Donovan pays limited attention to how British policy interacted with East African ambitions and no attention to the military.⁸ This is a significant oversight as, like the joint economic institutions which have received attention, the military was one of the major shared institutions of the late colonial era. As shown in this article, British planning for the KAR became inextricably intertwined with federal thinking, and the way military decolonisation took place substantially shaped the military inheritance of the three independent states. Thus, this article will follow Vaughan's suggestion that "rather than debating the viability of federal alternatives to the nation-state and the reasons for their failure, it may be more productive to consider what functions federalist projects had in shaping the character of newly independent states and their politics."⁹ Instead of focusing on creating three viable militaries, late colonial officials were hoping for an integrated institution. The failure of such plans resulted in an uneven military inheritance. Of the three inherited parts of the KAR, Uganda and Tanganyika achieved independence with armies that were not fully autonomous, while Kenya took most of the shared KAR facilities. The attempt to find alternatives to nation-states thus had a substantial impact even when these alternatives did not come to fruition.

The article begins by showing the significance of East African Federation as one of the possible futures imagined in East Africa in the late colonial era. It then examines the structures of and British policies towards the KAR in the 1950s. These two issues are then brought

⁴ Julius Nyerere, "Freedom and Unity," *Transition* 14 (1964), 43.

⁵ The National Archives, Kew (henceforth, TNA) CO 822/2729/31, Fraser to Secretary of State, 31 January 1961.

⁶ TNA FCO 141/7023/81, Telegram, Governor Entebbe to Secretary of State, 20 March 1961.

⁷ For histories of the KAR see H. Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles: A Study in the Military History of East and Central Africa, 1890-1945* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1956); Malcolm Page, *A History of the King's African Rifles and East African Forces* (London: Leo Cooper, 1998); Timothy H. Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999).

⁸ Chris Vaughan, "The Politics of Regionalism and Federation in East Africa, 1958-1964," *Historical Journal* 62:2 (2019), 519-540; Kevin P. Donovan, "Uhuru Sasa! Federal Futures and Liminal Sovereignty in Decolonizing East Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 65: 2 (2023), 372-398. Although see Spencer Mawby, *The End of Empire in Uganda: Decolonization and Institutional Conflict, 1945-79* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 56.

⁹ Vaughan, "Politics of Regionalism," 540. For debate on the viability of federal alternatives, see Richard Drayton, "Federal Utopias and the Realities of Imperial Power," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37: 2 (2017), 401-6; Samuel Moyn, "Fantasies of Federalism: Why did the Nation-state Model Win Out, When the Alternatives Were Supposedly So Compelling?" *Dissent Magazine*, Winter 2015, <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/fantasies-of-federalism>

together in the next section, which focuses largely on 1960–61, when debates about the KAR and the East African Federation became increasingly connected. This section explores how British ambitions for a federation shaped and delayed plans for the region's military independence. The final section reviews the uneven inheritance that resulted from this to argue that federal thinking inhibited the development of national militaries.

A possible East African Federation

In the final years of late colonialism in East Africa, possible political futures were widely and hotly debated. As Julie MacArthur rightly contends, “Far from the ordered transfer of power from colonial rulers to clearly defined, predestined nations, decolonization was more often a staggered and contested process, filled with frustrated political imaginaries and contradictory claims to the postcolony.”¹⁰ Federalism, sovereignty, regionalism, nationalism, and Pan-Africanism were all up for discussion, often with the aim to “remake global political and economic structures.”¹¹ The era of late colonialism in East Africa was not simply a period of rising nationalism, but one of multiple and complex political positions which go beyond simple categorisation.¹²

An East African Federation became part of the debate about possible futures during the era of late colonialism. Donovan has revealed how federation was “a style of claimsmaking, not only to orchestrate a postcolonial distribution of rights, resources, and authority, but also against the continued involvement of Britain in matters political and economic;” with federation especially significant in debates about the “temporality” of decolonisation.¹³ Thus, calls for federation could act as arguments for a shared pace of decolonisation across East Africa. Vaughan has further argued that “ideas of supra-national unity were co-opted into national-level debates over *internal* ‘sovereignty regimes’.”¹⁴ Federal thinking could thus serve to strengthen national leaders. Yet as Vaughan argues, and this article reinforces, there were “unpredictable consequences of federalist politics,” and the promotion of federalism did not always lead to the results that proponents had intended.¹⁵

Proposals for an East African Federation have a long history. Europeans in the region, and some British officials, had argued in favour of “closer union” since the 1920s.¹⁶ Until the late 1950s, however, Africans had been opposed, with justifiable fears that federation would entrench the domination of Kenya's Europeans, as was the case with Southern Rhodesian whites in the Central African Federation.¹⁷ In the late 1950s, some opinions changed as federation became seen as a way to improve independent status and advance

¹⁰ Julie MacArthur, “Decolonizing Sovereignty: States of Exception along the Kenya-Somali Frontier,” *American Historical Review* 124: 1 (2019), 123.

¹¹ Ismay Milford, Gerard McCann, Emma Hunter and Daniel Branch, “Another World? East Africa, Decolonisation, and the Global History of the Mid-Twentieth Century,” *The Journal of African History* 62: 3 (2021), 400.

¹² Emma Hunter, “Languages of Freedom in Decolonising Africa,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (2017), 254–5.

¹³ Donovan, “Federal Futures,” 377, 374.

¹⁴ His emphasis. Vaughan, “Politics of Regionalism,” 522.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 522.

¹⁶ Michael D. Callahan, “The Failure of ‘Closer Union’ in British East Africa, 1929–31,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25: 2 (1997), 267–93; N. J. Westcott, “Closer Union and the Future of East Africa, 1939–1948: A Case Study in the ‘Official Mind of Imperialism’,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 10: 1 (1981), 67–88.

¹⁷ Julius K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity: A Selection from Writings and Speeches 1952–65* (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1966), 24. On the Central African Federation comparison see, Ismay Milford, “Federation, Partnership, and the Chronologies of Space in 1950s East and Central Africa,” *Historical Journal* 63: 5 (2020), 1325–48.

Pan-Africanism (although the relationship between federalism and Pan-Africanism was vigorously debated).¹⁸ Federation was not just popular at an elite level, and also found support within the wider population.¹⁹ This must be situated too in the wider context of late colonialism and what Michael Collins has called a “federal moment” as the appeal of federations increased.²⁰

One reason why a federation appeared plausible, in addition to desirable, was the existence of institutions shared by the three colonies. As has recently been noted, there were “many ways in which the British Empire in East Africa [was] governed regionally.”²¹ Adopting a regional approach recognises the fact that the region was – in different ways and by varying people – considered as a unit.²² In 1958, the Pan-African Freedom Movement of Eastern and Central Africa (PAFMECA) was founded to make the case for Pan-Africanism, independence, and unity. There was a common market, common railways, harbours, and telecommunications services which were organised from 1948 by the East African High Commission.²³ There were also shared higher educational facilities.²⁴ Another crucial shared institution was the army, the colonial King’s African Rifles (KAR).

The late colonial KAR

In the 1950s, the make-up and structures of the KAR were shaped by British late colonial policies regarding violence, race, and the desire to keep as much control as possible over the process of decolonisation. The KAR was a colonial organisation built to secure British command of the region, and that thinking continued into the 1950s, with no plans for coming independence. Indeed, the British built the Kahawa base in Kenya in the late 1950s as one of their final acts of colonial military investment.²⁵ A federal army was not yet on the agenda because military independence had barely been contemplated. And while questions of sovereignty were debated across East Africa, and national armies are crucial signs of sovereignty,²⁶ politicians rarely paid such sustained attention to the military as to other areas of statehood in politics and the civil service.²⁷ Therefore, for much of the late colonial era, British policymakers faced few African demands about the military and were comparatively free to shape policy as they sought.

As the military force in the colonies, the KAR was tied to late colonial violence through its role in the British counter-insurgency campaign against Mau Mau from 1952.²⁸ Other forces were involved including the Home Guard and regiments of the British army, but the KAR

¹⁸ See Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits, “Introduction,” in *Visions of African Unity: New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects*, eds. Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 1–19.

¹⁹ Chris Vaughan, Julie MacArthur, Emma Hunter, and Gerard McCann, ‘Thinking East African: Debating Federation and Regionalism, 1960–1977’, in *Visions of African Unity: New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects*, eds. Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan: 2020), 49–75.

²⁰ Michael Collins, “Decolonisation and the ‘Federal Moment’,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24: 1 (2013), 21–40.

²¹ Vaughan, MacArthur, Hunter, and McCann, “Thinking East African,” 64.

²² Milford, McCann, Hunter and Branch, “Another World?” 396–7.

²³ Phillip Apuuli Kasaija, “Regional Integration: A Political Federation of the East African Countries?” *African Journal of International Affairs* 7: 1&2 (2004), 25.

²⁴ Michael Mwenda Kithinji, “An imperial enterprise: The making and breaking of the University of East Africa, 1949–1969,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue canadienne des études africaines* 46: 2 (2012), 195–214.

²⁵ Hilda Nissimi, “Illusions of World Power in Kenya: Strategy, Decolonization, and the British Base, 1946–1961,” *The International History Review* 23: 4 (2001), 836–41.

²⁶ Marco Wyss, *Postcolonial Security: Britain, France, and West Africa’s Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 147.

²⁷ William Gutteridge, “A Commonwealth Military Culture?” *The Round Table* 60: 239 (1970), 328–9.

²⁸ Parsons, *African Rank-and-File*, 39.

itself also engaged in significant acts of violence.²⁹ The Mau Mau Emergency also shaped the ethnic make-up of the KAR. It had always been an ethnically selective force, recruiting most from those colonial officials believed to be “martial races.”³⁰ During the Emergency, Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru, those most involved in Mau Mau, were banned from joining the KAR, and colonial officials attempted to ensure the loyalty of African servicemen, most notably the Kamba in Kenya.³¹

Late colonial thinking on race also affected the make-up of the KAR. It was a racially segregated force, with white officers seconded from Britain and Black rank-and-file askaris from the region. During the Second World War, Africans were promoted to non-commissioned officers but not further. This was in stark contrast to Britain’s West Africa policy, where the first African officers were commissioned in the late 1940s.³² This speaks to the unevenness of Britain’s late colonialism, shaped by ideas about race. In 1954, British officials noted that West Africans had commissions “largely owing to the more advanced political and social development ... In East Africa, the African is considerably less enlightened.”³³ With few white settlers in West Africa, Africans were allowed to progress to officer roles; in East Africa, where there were substantial European and Asian populations, Africans were excluded. Although the Africanisation of the officer corps in West Africa remained limited at independence, it was more advanced and took place over a longer period than in East Africa.³⁴ Late colonialism in East Africa was marked by a continuing unwillingness to treat Africans as equals, and in the KAR, this meant not allowing African officers.

The KAR was also shaped by the intensified interventionism of late colonialism and the desire of British officials to retain control over decolonisation.³⁵ This led to changes in how the KAR was governed. From the 1940s, the War Office had run it, but in 1957 the East African governments took over with the East African Land Forces Organisation. This meant that the three colonial governments were in charge of, and substantially paid the costs of, the KAR.³⁶ However, in 1959, British policymakers grew concerned that this situation could endanger British control by allowing African politicians power over the army before independence. They therefore proposed that the British government resume direct control and funding of the KAR to keep it “out of reach of the local politicians.”³⁷ The Colonial Secretary, Iain Macleod, argued to Cabinet that this would offer “the means by which it is possible to resist unconstitutional and illegal pressures for our quick exit from the region” and that “we should ... do all we can now, before it is too late, to insulate all the internal security forces of the territories from local political control.”³⁸ Cabinet agreed, with the proviso that the measure be presented to the East Africans as a generous offer of financial assistance, rather than a politically motivated plan to keep British control until the last possible moment.³⁹

²⁹ Huw Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Kenya Emergency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 167.

³⁰ Parsons, *African Rank-and-File*, 53.

³¹ Myles Osborne, “The Kamba and Mau Mau: Ethnicity, Development, and Chiefship, 1952–1960,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 43: 1 (2010), 75–8.

³² Suberu Ochi Abdulrahman and Henry Gyang Mang, “The Nigerian Army as a Product of Its Colonial History: Problems of Re-building Cohesion for an Army in Transition,” *International Affairs and Global Strategy*, 53 (2017), 26.

³³ TNA WO 32/15674/1B, The Kings African Rifles, Report by the Working Party on Terms of Service for Officers, 17 March 1954.

³⁴ Sarah Stockwell, *The British End of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 63–73.

³⁵ L. J. Butler, *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to a Post-Imperial World* (London: Tauris, 2002), 151.

³⁶ TNA CAB 129/200/1, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Future of East African Land Forces, 1 January 1960.

³⁷ TNA DEFE 7/1014/1, Gorell Barnes to Peck, 11 May 1959.

³⁸ TNA CAB 129/200/1, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Future of East African Land Forces, 1 January 1960.

³⁹ Ibid.; TNA CAB 128/34/2, Conclusions of a meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, 18 January 1960.

Instead of late colonialism resulting in a growth of African representation, as in other institutions, military power reverted to London, which sought to exercise greater direct control. By 1960, therefore, the government in Britain was fully in charge of the KAR's operations. Although colonial officials acknowledged coming political independence, they had made no moves towards military independence. No Africans had command experience in the KAR, either as officers or as its political leaders and there was so far little African pressure for this. The colonial institution remained entirely intact.

Federal thinking and the KAR

Beginning in 1960, a new British vision for the KAR's future took precedence: a federal army as part of an East African Federation. Renewed British hopes for federation were a response to the ongoing appeal of federation in East Africa. Federation was one possibility as a wide range of political actors argued "over the very meaning of sovereignty, citizenship, and nationhood in the postcolonial world."⁴⁰

British officials, however, did not significantly engage with these complex views. Instead, their key interlocutor in planning a federal army was Nyerere, leader of the Tanganyika African National Union and the East African political leader closest to achieving independence. As was frequently the case in the late colonial era, British policymakers prioritised supporting so-called "moderate" leaders who they thought would preserve their interests and ensure successful decolonisation. Nyerere appeared such a leader. In May 1960, Macleod dramatically accelerated the planned date for Tanganyika's independence from the late 1960s or 1970 to 1962 or 1963. This was largely to ensure that Nyerere's position could not be challenged by other Tanganyikan politicians who were perceived as less friendly to British interests.⁴¹ In June 1960, Nyerere spoke publicly in favour of federation.⁴² Nyerere suggested a delay to Tanganyika's independence so Uganda and Kenya could become independent at the same time. He argued that "The feeling of unity which now exists could, however, be whittled away if each country gets its independence separately." Therefore, "a Federation of East Africa" should precede independence.⁴³ While his proposal has since been judged "rather hypothetical,"⁴⁴ it makes clear the consistent link between support for federation and calls for quick independence and sovereignty. As Africans engaged in debates about the future and disputed who would gain the benefits of independence, federal arguments became one of the tools of this debate.⁴⁵

Given Nyerere's prominence and perceived moderation, British officials needed to take note of his views. Luckily for them, he considered federation an excellent idea. Recognising, however, that British advocacy was likely to prove counter-productive, Macleod "thought it essential that the initiative for a federation should come from East Africa."⁴⁶ Federation was often perceived in East Africa as a scheme to perpetuate British neo-colonialism, an idea strongly perpetuated by Ghanaian propaganda, which found a receptive audience in Uganda.⁴⁷ Given British attempts to continue military control displayed in this article, these

⁴⁰ MacArthur, "Decolonizing Sovereignty," 109. See also Hunter, "Languages of Freedom," 253–269.

⁴¹ Peter Docking, "'The Wind Has Been Gathering Force': Iain Macleod and His Policy Change on Tanganyika," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46: 2 (2018), 377.

⁴² "Nyerere proposes E. Africa Federation: Uhuru for All," *Tanganyika Standard*, 17 June 1960, 1.

⁴³ Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 85.

⁴⁴ Vaughan, "Politics of Regionalism," 538.

⁴⁵ Donovan, "Federal Futures," 377.

⁴⁶ TNA PREM 11/4083, EAC (61) Minutes 1, Report of Proceedings, January 1961.

⁴⁷ Adam LoBue, "'They must either be informed or they will be cominformed': Covert propaganda, political literacy, and cold war knowledge production in the Loyal African Brothers series," *Journal of Global History* 18: 1 (2023), 81–2.

concerns appear justified, although this is not to claim that the British government would or could have imposed a federation without East African support in the 1960s. The British government was well aware that such action would be detrimental to their interests.

For British military planners, the prospect of federation came to shape their hopes for the KAR. Their ideal was that the KAR would continue along existing lines as a federal army. Along with the East African High Commission, the KAR was one of the few institutions already organised regionally. It would not have to be integrated to create a federation but would instead need to be divided if the three territories reached independence as separate nation-states. Following this logic, at the January 1961 East Africa Conference, colonial officials agreed that the KAR should continue unchanged until a federal army would take over.⁴⁸ As with other arguments for federation, the practical and economic benefits of larger territorial units were key reasons why a joint military was appealing.⁴⁹ More broadly, colonial officials expected benefits from federation “in terms of their future security, stability and wealth,” as well as ensuring the security of the European and Asian populations and maintaining British interests in the region.⁵⁰

Almost as soon as the idea of federation gained public traction, however, the likelihood of imminently achieving it decreased. With colonial officials unwilling to advance the pace of independence in Uganda and Kenya, Nyerere turned instead to pushing for an early date for Tanganyika’s national independence, achieving in March 1961 a date of December 1961.⁵¹ This meant that the three territories would reach independence at different times rather than achieve collective federal independence as Nyerere had hoped. Such “divergent temporalities” made federation more difficult to achieve in practical terms.⁵² Nonetheless, the idea of federation retained appeal in East Africa and continued to be discussed in the press and by politicians.⁵³

In Britain, military planners were left scrambling to respond to the accelerated political timetable. In early 1961, British officials began discussing in earnest the future of the KAR’s Tanganyikan battalions, with proposals pulling in two different directions. The governor of Uganda “regarded the ultimate creation of a Federal army for East Africa on lines of existing K.A.R. as a crucial factor in ensuring the future stability of the region as a whole.”⁵⁴ By comparison, J. A. Sankey in the Colonial Office considered it “necessary to ‘unscramble’ the present unified command set-up and constitute the Tanganyika units of the King’s African Rifles as a separate force.”⁵⁵ The question of whether to plan for a joint future for the KAR or three separate armies was still undecided. Recognising that colonial rule was in its terminal phase did not mean agreement among British officials on how to attempt to manage the process. As these examples show, it was frequently those in the region who were least willing to give up on a federal army. This was perhaps because they were more attuned to the favourable views towards federation within East Africa, or that they were closer to local interests, including Europeans, who favoured preserving British influence.⁵⁶ But this also

⁴⁸ TNA CO 822/2729/3, East African Conference, 1961, Summary of Principal Conclusions.

⁴⁹ See TNA PREM 11/4083, EAC (61) 16, East African Federation, Considerations arising from Conference discussion on 4 January 1961.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ John Iliffe, “TANU and the Colonial Office,” *Tanzania Zamani* 3: 2 (1997), 45.

⁵² Donovan, “Federal Futures,” 386.

⁵³ See for examples “Federation Among Topics: Kenya Sending to Talks on Tanganyika,” *Tanganyika Standard*, 23 May 1961, 1; “Riddle of East African Federation, Letters to the Editor,” *East African Standard*, 15 July 1961, 3; “Committee to Probe Federation,” *Daily Nation*, 4 August 1961, 5.

⁵⁴ TNA CO 968/724/37, Telegram, Uganda to Colonial Office, 20 March 1961.

⁵⁵ TNA CO 968/724/12, Sankey to Colonel Forrester, 16 February 1961.

⁵⁶ See for example TNA PREM 11/4083, Considerations arising from East African Conference discussion, 4 January 1961.

suggests an unwillingness to give up the position of power and control colonial governors and civil servants were used to.

The governor of Tanganyika, Richard Turnbull, aimed to keep the KAR intact beyond Tanganyika's independence. Despite the absence of an immediate federation, he hoped that one might occur in future. Turnbull argued that:

Fragmentation of the K.A.R. appears a retrograde step at this stage, and one difficult to reverse later. Not only would it prejudice the concept of a future federal army, but, it seems to me, it reverses the trend towards a Federation at all, by destroying in advance one of the few existing regional unifying forces.⁵⁷

Therefore, Turnbull advocated a federal army regardless of Tanganyika's coming national independence. In April 1961, after the date for Tanganyika's independence had been set, he argued that Britain "should use every proper stratagem" to ensure there was "no unseemly haste to convert our K.A.R. battalions into a National Army"; instead he hoped to convince Tanganyika's ministers "to agree to allowing the K.A.R. to stay in the capacity, as it were, of paying guests during 1962."⁵⁸ He proposed that Britain continue to pay for and command the KAR as a whole, rather than have Tanganyika's battalions form a national army. His plan would allow the KAR to seamlessly transition into a federal army, which Turnbull hoped would be formed a few years later after the independence of Uganda and Kenya.

The suggestion that the armed forces of an independent country would, in effect, be British raises significant questions of sovereignty and the meaning of independence. How could a country be truly independent if the former colonial power still held a monopoly on military force? This seems remarkably insensitive to ongoing debates about East Africa's future sovereignty.⁵⁹ That such a proposal could be considered at all was due to the desire for federation, and that maintaining the unity of the KAR would cause the least disruption before a predicted future federal army. Colonial officials in London, however, recognised the issues. As one official archly noted, "the fact remains that one cannot have a Federal Army without a Federation."⁶⁰ W. B. L. Monson from the Colonial Office replied to Turnbull and made clear that his proposal was untenable: "independence means full control of one's own policies and an army is inescapably an instrument of national policy."⁶¹ The Colonial Office understood that Tanganyika at independence would need to take control of and pay for its army as a separate institution, with command resting in the Tanganyikan Ministry of Defence. Turnbull's plan was thus rejected. However, Turnbull offers a striking example of a colonial official who struggled to relinquish his grand ambitions as these clashed with the reality of imminent independence. This also provides support for the idea that an East African federation was intended by at least some as an instrument of British neo-colonialism.

In an era of late colonialism, however, proposals for the KAR were dependent on Tanganyika's leaders. In early 1961, Nyerere contemplated not having an army at all and relying on the police for internal security.⁶² The Colonial Office considered this "a grave mistake" and aimed to discourage him.⁶³ Alternatively, Nyerere proposed "an African High

⁵⁷ TNA FCO 141/6800/D9, Telegram, Turnbull to Secretary of State, 25 March 1961.

⁵⁸ TNA FCO 141/6800/12/1, Turnbull to Monson, 27 April 1961.

⁵⁹ On the complexities of ideas of sovereignty in East Africa see James R. Brennan, "Lowering the Sultan's Flag: Sovereignty and Decolonization in Coastal Kenya," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50: 4 (2008), 833-8.

⁶⁰ TNA CO 968/724, Minute, Carstairs to Vile, Morgan, 12 May 1961.

⁶¹ TNA FCO 141/6800/13, Monson to Turnbull, 17 May 1961.

⁶² TNA CO 968/724/11, Morgan to Vile, 3 February 1961.

⁶³ TNA FCO 141/6800/D2, Monson to Turnbull, 3 March 1961.

Command,” a continental military force, to avoid “a second scramble for Africa” by external powers.⁶⁴ His focus here was on Pan-Africanism, and reflected his concern that separate independent states would be harder to integrate later, although this idea does not seem to have gained much further traction. This speaks to the apparent possibilities of the late colonial moment, before practical considerations of statehood foreclosed other options. Turnbull had claimed that Nyerere supported his plan because independent Tanganyika could not afford the costs of the military. If this was ever the case, Nyerere quickly changed his mind, stating publicly in early April that “the K.A.R. is not our own military force: it is British and it is the British taxpayer who pays for it ... It would of course make nonsense of independence to have another country controlling, or even just paying for our military forces.”⁶⁵ As Timothy Parsons has argued, East Africa’s leaders turned against the idea of a federal army because “the financial savings ... were offset by the unpleasant realization that the plan would have limited their authority over their national armed forces.”⁶⁶ In a May 1961 memorandum, Nyerere asked his Cabinet “formally to endorse the proposition that at independence the Tanganyika Units of the K.A.R. should cease to be controlled by Her Majesty’s Government; and should become ... the Army of Tanganyika.”⁶⁷ Nyerere was now committed to a sovereign army distinct from the KAR.

At the same time, it was impossible to yet fully extricate Tanganyika’s two battalions from the KAR. Nyerere thus also wanted to negotiate “continued reliance on East Africa Command for administrative support.” This included “workshops, stores, ammunition supplies, transport, signals, etc.” all of which were shared and largely based in Kenya.⁶⁸ Without an agreement, Tanganyika would face significant costs to replace these facilities. Such arrangements, which British officials were keen to ensure, appeared to leave open the prospect of a federal future, when administration and operational command would once again be united.⁶⁹ However, these arrangements also show how federal thinking was detrimental to the independent Tanganyika army: it did not have the necessary administrative facilities, and there was not enough time to develop them with only months before independence. The independent army would thus need to rely on Britain and Kenya.

Moreover, independent Tanganyika would have to rely on Britain for military officers. At the start of 1961, there were no African officers in the KAR, and the highest role Africans could access was effendi, a rank created in 1956 to avoid commissioning Africans.⁷⁰ Although in other sectors late colonialism meant an increase in African participation, this was not true in the military. Thus, as colonial officials began to seriously plan for military independence, commissioning Africans was the most pressing issue. While in 1958 policy-makers had argued that “effendis are not suitable for commissioning,”⁷¹ by 1961 time was running out and the first twelve effendis were commissioned in July.⁷² Twelve was a very small number of officers to cover three separate territories just months before Tanganyika’s independence. Colonial officials had made this crucial step towards military independence

⁶⁴ “Nyerere in favour of African Command,” *Tanganyika Standard*, 21 April 1961, 1.

⁶⁵ “Nyerere sounds the Klaxon: Only us to pay cost of self-government,” *Tanganyika Standard*, 3 April 1961, 1.

⁶⁶ Timothy H. Parsons, *The 1964 Army Mutinies and the Making of Modern East Africa* (Westport CT: Praeger, 2003), 162.

⁶⁷ TNA CO 968/724/81, Cabinet paper no. 21 of 1961, Memorandum by the Prime Minister, Dar es Salaam, Future of the King’s African Rifles Units in Tanganyika, 24 May 1961.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ See TNA FCO 141/6800/14, Future of the KAR in Tanganyika, Main points of discussion between the Governor and Chief of Staff, Headquarters, East Africa Command, 6 June 1961.

⁷⁰ TNA WO 32/16565, Introduction in East Africa of the Senior Warrant Officer Rank of “Effendi”, DPA to DMT, 14 February 1956.

⁷¹ TNA CO 968/666, Minute, Majendie to Sankey, Buist and Campbell, 6 November 1958.

⁷² TNA CO 968/723/E/15, Memorandum by the General Officer Commanding, African Officers in the KAR, 27 September 1961.

far too late.⁷³ Tanganyika requested places at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in Britain to progress officer training as quickly as possible.⁷⁴ But this request was not made until July 1961, and the course lasted for two years. It was clear that Tanganyika would reach independence with very few African officers. Recognising this, Nyerere ensured that British officers would remain after independence to fill the necessary ranks.⁷⁵

At the same time, continuing hopes for a federal army significantly shaped the process of commissioning Africans. Military officials planned commissions for the KAR as a whole rather than for each country individually. Eight of the twelve commissioned in July 1961 were Kenyan, two Ugandan, and two Tanganyikan.⁷⁶ A target in September 1961 for seventy African officers by mid-1962 included twenty-two Tanganyikan, twelve Ugandan, and thirty-six Kenyan officers.⁷⁷ These figures reflected the colonies' contributions to the KAR, as Tanganyika had two battalions, Uganda one and Kenya three.⁷⁸ By mid-1962, the date officials were planning until, Tanganyika would be independent, yet British military officers continued to plan for the KAR as a single unit. They seem to have had no expectation that Tanganyikan ministers would take over this planning.

African politicians themselves, however, were increasingly considering issues of military sovereignty. Milton Obote, leader of the Uganda People's Congress, visited the KAR in Uganda in November 1961. Obote frankly told the KAR's commanders that "He did not consider that EA Federation was a starter for some time ahead. He did not see Uganda's forces ever being controlled by anyone other than the Prime Minister or Minister of Defence of Uganda."⁷⁹ Obote was aiming for national military control and full sovereignty. Therefore, while federation remained a possibility, "a separate identity for the Uganda armed forces was inescapable."⁸⁰ Officials agreed that Ugandan effendis serving in Kenya or Tanganyika should return to Uganda and Tanganyikans to Tanganyika.⁸¹

Another issue that increasingly preoccupied the KAR's commanders was its joint identity. With hopes for an immediate federal army dashed, British officials clung to symbols and hoped that aspects of the KAR's identity would be retained by Tanganyika after independence. The General Officer Commanding (GOC), the top military officer in the KAR, "strongly recommend[ed] that the GOC East Africa Command should, if possible, retain an interest in and authority to visit the 6th and 2/6th King's African Rifles (The Tanganyika Rifles) after Independence."⁸² The role he envisaged for himself was not the command position Turnbull had advocated, but would keep the KAR's commander engaged with Tanganyika's independent army. The GOC also issued a "very strong plea for the preservation of their KAR identity ... together with their Oath of Allegiance to the Queen, their colours, their uniforms and traditions."⁸³ He hoped that the colonial KAR would remain little touched by independence. In a similar way, British military officials hoped that the name of KAR would be retained in some form, with the suggestion of naming the new army "The Tanganyika Rifles (The 6th Battalion The King's African Rifles)."⁸⁴ While Nyerere

⁷³ See Poppy Cullen, "Military decolonisation and Africanisation: the first African officers in the Kenyan army, 1957–1964," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 17: 3 (2023), 515–533.

⁷⁴ TNA CO 968/724/86, June Discussions, Tanganyika Government Paper No. F11, Military Forces, July 1961.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ TNA CO 968/723/E/15, Memorandum by the GOC, African Officers in the KAR, 27 September 1961.

⁷⁷ TNA CO 968/723/E/15, Memorandum by the GOC, Replacement of Effendi Posts by SSC General List Officers (African), 27 September 1961.

⁷⁸ TNA WO 32/20382/8A, Profumo to Minister of Defence, 6 February 1962.

⁷⁹ TNA FCO 141/18393/69, Lieutenant Colonel Cheyne to Champion and Brigadier Biggs, 25 November 1961.

⁸⁰ TNA FCO 141/18393/65, Note of meeting held in the Governor's Office on Monday, 20 November 1961.

⁸¹ TNA FCO 141/18393/48, M/SER to Hughes, 6 October 1961.

⁸² TNA FCO 141/6982/95, GOC to War Office, Future of the King's African Rifles in Tanganyika, 6 June 1961.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ TNA CO 968/725/105, Telegram, Turnbull to Secretary of State, 2 September 1961.

initially seemed open to the suggestion, it was soon rejected by Tanganyika's ministers, who preferred the simple title of "The Tanganyika Rifles."⁸⁵ A change in uniforms was also intended.⁸⁶

While issues like names and uniforms may appear to have limited importance, such symbols matter as part of a process of decolonisation.⁸⁷ With the impossibility of overhauling the whole colonial system at independence, the symbolism of sovereignty and nationhood held particular significance. Language politics were also important here, as the KAR operated in Swahili, but the language of a federation was contested and Swahili was not universally popular as a federal language.⁸⁸ In November, the GOC paid "a farewell visit to K.A.R. units in Tanganyika" – a far cry from the continuing role he had originally hoped for and a sign that colonial military control was ending.⁸⁹ The independence celebrations on 9 December featured "a moving handing over of the colours from the 6th Battalion, KAR, to the new Tanganyika Rifles to the strains of Auld Lang Syne".⁹⁰ The symbolism was resonant as the KAR was ritually replaced by the Tanganyika Rifles.

To some British military planners, however, the change was not so obvious. Even after Tanganyika's independence, they continued to include Tanganyika in their plans for Africanisation in the officer corps, noting in February 1962, for example, that "there are in the King's African Rifles (including the Tanganyika Rifles) 16 African officers."⁹¹ Despite the fact that the Tanganyika Rifles was the army of an independent state, British officials still thought of the former KAR as a unity. In the same month, a British KAR commander acknowledged that "It is obvious that the KAR link is politically dangerous, as the name alone is unacceptable, but an East African link could be maintained, and even exploited, if sufficient discretion was exercised."⁹² The KAR's colonial associations were not popular, but British officials wanted to keep the connection. Close ties between the KAR and Tanganyika Rifles would also help to ensure British links and offer a means "of freezing-out offers of military training aid from Communist and Pan-African states."⁹³ Britain hoped for influence in the independent army, and securing their position ahead of potential Cold War rivals was an increasing concern.⁹⁴ This led to plans for a joint training centre for the KAR and the Tanganyika Rifles to encourage cooperation in case "once again the units of the late KAR be reunited into a Federal Army."⁹⁵ However unlikely this might appear, it speaks to the possibilities that seemed inherent in the late colonial moment, as colonial planners were confronted with the realities of African independence and groped for ways to preserve their influence.

After Tanganyika's independence, debates over regionalism, nationalism and federalism continued in East Africa. These were especially pronounced in Kenya, as politicians and parties clashed over the best approach to achieving independence.⁹⁶ In June 1963,

⁸⁵ TNA CO 968/725/130, Turnbull to Monson, 20 November 1961.

⁸⁶ TNA CO 968/724/81, Cabinet paper no. 21 of 1961, Memorandum by the Prime Minister, Dar es Salaam, Future of the King's African Rifles Units in Tanganyika, 24 May 1961.

⁸⁷ Charles Girard Thomas, "The Tanzanian People's Defense Force: An Exercise in Nation-Building" (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2012), 95.

⁸⁸ Vaughan, "Politics of Regionalism," 533.

⁸⁹ "G.O.C. Here for Last K.A.R. Visit," *Tanganyika Standard*, 22 November 1961, 1.

⁹⁰ "Uhuru Dances In: Birth of New State," *Daily Nation*, 9 December 1961, 1.

⁹¹ TNA WO 32/20382/8A, Profumo to Minister of Defence, 6 February 1962.

⁹² TNA FCO 141/18393/95A, Brigadier Howard to Inf Bde KAR, February 62.

⁹³ TNA FCO 141/18393/95A, Brigadier Howard to Inf Bde KAR, February 62.

⁹⁴ See Wyss, *Postcolonial Security*, 12–14; Poppy Cullen, *Kenya and Britain after Independence: Beyond Neo-Colonialism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 120–6.

⁹⁵ TNA FCO 141/18393/95, Brigadier Biggs to Cotton, 12 March 1962.

⁹⁶ Donovan, "Federal Futures," 374; David M. Anderson, "'Yours in Struggle for Majimbo'. Nationalism and the Party Politics of Decolonization in Kenya, 1955–64," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40: 3 (2005), 547–564; Cherry Gertzel, *The Politics of Independent Kenya 1963–8* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 2–18.

Nyerere and Obote, leaders of independent Tanganyika and Uganda, met with colonial Kenya's Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta and signed a declaration stating their intention to federate before the end of the year.⁹⁷ This was, in part, intended to push Britain towards setting a date for Kenyan independence, and some, including Kenyatta, later argued that this was its primary purpose.⁹⁸ Again, demands for rapid independence were tied to ideas of federation. As Vaughan has argued, this meeting of the "big three" also acted as a statement to reinforce their position as the leading politicians in their countries.⁹⁹ Colonial officials were encouraged by enthusiastic reports from the region to set an early date for Kenya's independence.¹⁰⁰ Planning for a federation began. A working party was set up and made some progress towards drafting a federal constitution, with defence included as a federal responsibility.¹⁰¹ Within months, Obote's commitment to federation weakened and conflicts emerged.¹⁰² Nonetheless, colonial officials looking to Kenya's military future continued to reflect federal thinking, and so argued that any Kenyan military expansion "should be so planned as not to form an obstacle to the formation of a federal army later."¹⁰³ Despite much optimism, by the autumn federal plans had come to naught. Kenya became independent in December 1963 and the KAR ceased to exist, its final battalions forming Kenya's national army.

Three national armies

The armies of the newly independent states were "directly inherited" from the colonial.¹⁰⁴ Their structures were based on British models, and their commanding officers were British. Continuities into the post-colonial era were clear and direct, with the break at independence more symbolic than genuinely transformative. The KAR had been set up to enforce colonial power and keep the populations controlled; independent armies were to protect the nation from external threats. The former colonies thus inherited armies that had "never been designed to fulfil the security needs of a newly independent state but had been formed to meet the requirements of a declining colonial power."¹⁰⁵ The new governments now had the difficult task of reshaping these into independent institutions, something the British had almost entirely neglected.

Moreover, the British government's planning for a federal army in East Africa had profound consequences. It is well known that concern about Kenya benefitting most from a federation economically was one reason politicians in Tanganyika and Uganda rejected it, and Kenya did benefit most from the later East African Community.¹⁰⁶ The military consequences were also significant. The fact that there had been a shared colonial army, and that continuing this had been prioritised, meant that the military inheritance of the three countries was extremely uneven. Kenya, the last to achieve independence, had the most beneficial inheritance. First, Kenya's army was larger, with three battalions, compared to Uganda's one and Tanganyika's two. Second, the East Africa Command Headquarters

⁹⁷ TNA CO 822/3194/27, Telegram, Commonwealth Relations Office to Missions, 19 June 1963.

⁹⁸ "Kenya Gain of Independence by a Ruse", *The Times*, 3 August 1964, 7.

⁹⁹ Vaughan, "Politics of Regionalism," 528.

¹⁰⁰ TNA PREM 11/4083, Telegram, Commonwealth Relations Office to Dar es Salaam, 1 July 1963.

¹⁰¹ TNA CO 822/3195, Draft constitution, Appendix E [1963].

¹⁰² TNA CO 822/3194/77, Hunt to Garner, 11 July 1963.

¹⁰³ TNA FCO 141/7037/1/1, Cabinet Committee on Kenya's Future Army, Memorandum by the Ministry of Internal Security and Defence, 16 August 1963.

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Brooks, "The Creation and Impact of British Colonial Armies in Africa," (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2019), 1.

¹⁰⁵ Mawby, *The End of Empire in Uganda*, 78.

¹⁰⁶ Donovan, "Federal Futures," 381, 398.

and training facilities were based in Nairobi; Kenya also had more military hardware.¹⁰⁷ Third, Kenya had more commissioned African officers: at independence, Tanganyika had six African of sixty-four officers; Uganda fourteen of sixty-four; Kenya eighty of 165.¹⁰⁸ In part, the higher number of African officers was because Kenya achieved independence last, so there was more time to build up an officer corps. Yet even at the time of Tanganyikan independence, there were more African officers in Kenya than in Tanganyika or Uganda. Kenya had more military facilities, a larger military, and a higher proportion of African officers at independence.

After independence, Tanganyika and Uganda had to work hard to create viable national militaries. Britain had not established separate military headquarters in Tanganyika and Uganda prior to independence because a federation would make these unnecessary. Without a federation, they were left in a weaker position. Both approached Britain for, and received, financial assistance to help set up their own headquarters.¹⁰⁹ Kenya also received financial assistance from Britain, but already had the KAR's headquarters, so could spend this money elsewhere. The new Tanganyikan and Ugandan governments had to invest, while Kenya inherited existing facilities.

In January 1964, all three national armies mutinied. Scholars have often pointed to their common past in the KAR and the connections between the three militaries as one reason why mutiny spread from Tanganyika to Uganda and Kenya.¹¹⁰ But it was not just a common past: as shown above, until 1961, and longer in some quarters, these armies had been expected to share a common future. It is thus unsurprising that grievances were similar across the three armies. After the mutinies, however, the trajectories of the militaries diverged. Nyerere, facing the most serious mutiny in Tanganyika, opted to create an entirely new army, doing his best to remove the vestiges of the KAR.¹¹¹ Both he and Obote expelled British officers and rapidly progressed Africanisation programmes. Kenyatta, by contrast, opted to continue relying on the unreformed KAR model, and on Britain.¹¹² While British policymakers had many reasons for prioritising Kenya after independence,¹¹³ it is worth noting that Kenya was the best equipped militarily, making it a more valuable partner. Thus, Britain was willing to help Kenya to form a national navy, which could use existing facilities that the Royal Navy also benefitted from, but not willing to do the same for Tanganyika where the costs would be higher because of the need to start from scratch.¹¹⁴ The post-independence military histories of the three countries were considerably shaped by late colonial plans which aimed for unity, but in fact benefitted one country at the expense of the others.

Conclusion

The period of late colonialism was a time when multiple futures appeared possible, and although independence was obviously approaching, the form it would take was still up for debate. In the early 1960s, a range of actors – both British and African – saw in an

¹⁰⁷ TNA FCO 141/6800/13, Monson to Turnbull, 17 May 1961.

¹⁰⁸ Blake Humphrey Whitaker, "The 'New Model' Armies of Africa?: The British Military Advisory and Training Team and the Creation of the Zimbabwe National Army," (PhD diss., Texas A&M University, 2014), 77.

¹⁰⁹ TNA CO 968/726/E176, Butler, Financial Arrangements for Tanganyika Defence Forces since independence and financial settlement for Uganda defence forces upon independence, 8 May 1962.

¹¹⁰ See for example Parsons, "Lanet Incident," 51.

¹¹¹ Thomas, "Tanzanian People's Defense Force," 6.

¹¹² Parsons, 1964 *Army Mutinies*, 25–6.

¹¹³ Cullen, *Kenya and Britain*, 15.

¹¹⁴ TNA DO 213/49/51, MOD DS 5a, Memorandum, Possible formation of a Tanzanian Navy, 3 February 1965.

East African Federation an alternative route to independence and prosperity. British military planners wholeheartedly endorsed such thinking and projected a future federal army for the region. Reluctant to abandon these plans, colonial officials were left scrambling to respond to changing political realities; “lateness” proceeded along different trajectories, with military change dragging behind political. A number of the military suggestions discussed in this article appear fundamentally unrealistic, seeming to deny the significance of a sovereign independent military. Yet rather than simply dismissing these ideas, it is worth considering them in the context of late colonialism, when the combination of a more interventionist colonial state, the “federal moment,” and Pan-Africanism made alternatives to nation-states seem appealing. Nyerere’s suggestion of an African continental military force may look as unlikely in practice as Turnbull’s plan to keep British control of Tanganyika’s army after independence. But both stem from the sense of possibility that characterised the period prior to – but in sight of – the end of colonial rule. As Nyerere had warned, when nation-states emerged, alternative prospects diminished.

Finally, the plan for an East African federal army highlights how important the era of late colonialism was, and the extent to which it shaped the post-colonial. Examining how and why late colonial alternatives were pursued is crucial for understanding what followed independence. In this case, the KAR was split up to create national armies. Each country retained the battalions they had primarily staffed, leading to an unequal military inheritance. Thus, rather than contributing to African unity, federal military thinking resulted in an uneven distribution of assets that benefitted Kenya and disadvantaged Uganda and Tanganyika. Alternative late colonial visions for the future did not have to be realised to leave a strong imprint on independent nation-states.

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