**Secret archive shames Britain**

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THOUSANDS of documents detailing some of the most shameful acts and crimes committed during the final years of the British Empire were systematically destroyed to prevent them falling into the hands of post-independence governments.

Those papers that survived the purge were flown discreetly to Britain where they were hidden for 50 years in a secret Foreign Office archive, beyond the reach of historians and members of the public, and in breach of legal obligations for them to be transferred into the public domain.

Barack Obama, the father of the US President, tops a list of names revealed in a hitherto secret British file of Kenyans studying in the US. The file notes the US State Department had told British officials in 1959 it was concerned Kenyan students in the US had a reputation for ''falling into the wrong hands''.

The President's father is listed as ''OBAMA, Barrack H'', a student who met a white American called Ann Dunham on a Russian language course at the University of Hawaii. They married and had a son, elected the first black US president in 2008.

The secret archive came to light last year when a group of Kenyans detained and allegedly tortured during the Mau Mau rebellion won the right to sue the British government. The Foreign Office promised to release the 8800 files from 37 former colonies held at the highly secure government communications centre at Hanslope Park in Buckinghamshire.

The historian appointed to oversee the review and transfer, Tony Badger, master of Clare College, Cambridge, says the discovery of the archive put the Foreign Office in an ''embarrassing, scandalous'' position. ''These documents should have been in the public archives in the 1980s,'' he said. ''It's long overdue.'' The first of them are now available to the public at the National Archive.

The papers include monthly intelligence reports on the ''elimination'' of the colonial authority's enemies in 1950s Malaya; records showing ministers in London were aware of the torture and murder of Mau Mau insurgents in Kenya, including a man said to have been ''roasted alive''; and papers detailing the lengths to which the UK went to forcibly remove islanders from Diego Garcia.

Among the documents are a handful that show that many of the most sensitive papers from Britain's late colonial era were destroyed.

These papers give the instructions for systematic destruction issued in 1961 after Iain Macleod, secretary of state for the colonies, directed that post-independence governments should not get any material that ''might embarrass her majesty's government''.

Among the documents that appear to have been destroyed were: records of the abuse of Mau

Mau insurgents detained, tortured and sometimes murdered by British colonial authorities; reports that may have detailed the alleged massacre of 24 unarmed villagers in Malaya by Scots Guards in 1948; sensitive documents kept by authorities in Aden, where the army's Intelligence Corps operated a secret torture centre in the 1960s; and every sensitive document kept by the authorities in British Guiana.

The documents that were not destroyed appear to have been kept secret not only to protect the UK's reputation, but to shield the government from litigation. If the Mau Mau detainees are successful in their legal action, thousands more veterans are expected to follow.

The documents show colonial officials were instructed to separate those papers to be left in place after independence from those that were to be selected for destruction or removal to the UK.

Officials were warned that they would be prosecuted if they took any paperwork home - and some were.

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Read more: http://www.theage.com.au/world/secret-archive-shames- britain-20120418-1x7j9.html#ixzz1sQJwCOxn

     