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**Barnard, Niël. *Secret Revolution; Memoirs of a Spy Boss*, Cape Town: Tafelberg, Heerengracht, 2016.**

This fascinating memoir is authored by Dr. Niël Barnard, the last director of the National Intelligence Agency of the Apartheid State of South Africa. It is an insider's account of the delicate and clandestine negotiations that took place between the secretive cabal/inner circles of former South African presidents P.W. Botha and his successor, F.W. de Klerk, and the world's most celebrated prisoner, anti-apartheid revolutionary, and human rights activist, Nelson Mandela. These secret talks culminated in the largely non-violent transition of power from South Africa's white political class to the Black majority, led by the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994.

The book has 25 chapters in total, complimented by "Nelson Mandela's Political Testimony, Addressed to P.W. Botha" as well as end notes. The book is presented in language that is simple and straight forward, as it avoids academic jargon, which can easily put off readers who simply wish to find out how the delicate talks between the White South African government and Nelson Mandela were conducted. Barnard's book also shows the global ramifications of South Africa's transition from pariah state to the "rainbow nation" that emerged after the ANC's assumption of political power following the 1994 elections. Barnard explains how South Africa's National Security Service engaged with the security services of Eastern bloc states, notably the former Soviet Union, Cuba, and East Germany. He also provides information on South Africa's interactions with the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Israeli Mossad, British Secret Intelligence Services, and the French and German intelligence services. The book also offers riveting revelations about a wide network of contacts South Africa's secret service established with counterpart entities in Black-ruled Africa, notably Zambia, which offered sanctuary to the then 'terrorist' African National Congress (ANC), and French speaking states like Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, and Zaire.

Barnard was born in 1949, in then-South West Africa, now known as Namibia, in the small town of Otavi, located in the larger district of Otjiwarongo. He reports, "My father, who was a natural leader, became headmaster of the Primary School at Otjiwarongo at a young age. Later, he was appointed as school inspector, and later still, as Chief Inspector of Education in South West Africa" (p.24). As a white South African born in the former German colony of South West Africa, which had come under South Africa's administration as a consequence of Germany's defeat in the first World War, Barnard at first undertook duties to defend South Africa's occupation of South West Africa in the face of growing calls for European powers to end colonial rule in Africa. Thus, he did his compulsory military service in the Commando System, within which he reached the rank of captain. He adds, "In Bloemfontein [South Africa], I also joined the Citizen Force and regularly undertook periods of service in this capacity" (p.25). Barnard then went on to study political science at the University of the Orange Free State, where he eventually earned a doctorate and pursued an academic career in the Department of Political Science. He made extraordinary progress and was promoted to Professor of Political Science at age 27 (p.27). Three years later (1979), however, at the tender age of 30, Barnard was summoned by South Africa's President P.W. Botha and offered the job of Director of South Africa's National Intelligence Service (NIS). Of this turn of events, Barnard says, "Botha's offer came completely out of the blue at 30 years of age and catapulted my life in a totally different direction" (p.27).

In this memoir, Barnard demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the protracted insurgency waged by the Algerian anti-colonial movement, the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), led by charismatic nationalist leader Ahmed Ben Bella against the French colonial army in Algeria. From this, Barnard came to the conclusion that such insurgencies can never be resolved by armed struggle but rather must be resolved through a process of political

negotiation. It was this intellectual conviction, largely influenced by his educational background in political science that persuaded him that South Africa's internal political conflict between the White Apartheid state and Black guerrilla movements such as the African National Congress (ANC), Pan African Congress (PAC), etc. required a political settlement. Certainly, upon the start of Barnard's tenure as director of South Africa's NIS, there was no honeymoon period in which to settle into his new daunting role. He reports, "On my first day as head of national security, my path crossed with that of the ANC, in a manner of speaking. In the early hours of Sunday, 1 June, limpet mines exploded at Sasol 1 in Sasolburg...and caused damage to the value of R66 billion. Oliver Tambo, at the time the president of the exiled ANC in Lusaka, claimed responsibility for the attacks"(p.21). Barnard had little choice but to consider drastic measures.

Barnard reveals how South Africa's National Intelligence Service supplied information about Southern Africa to numerous intelligence services in Europe, the USA, Latin America, the Middle and Far East, and North Africa. In exchange, The NIS received information about the ANC in those parts of the world. He also points out, however, that because the political sympathies of a number of governments lay with the ANC and not with the Apartheid state, the intelligence provided by other nations about the activities of the ANC coming through official channels was often very limited. Nevertheless, the penetrative influence of South Africa's NIS in Black Africa—whose governments ritualistically denounced South Africa at meetings of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations (UN) and other forums—was considerable. Barnard reveals that "on more than one occasion, members of the NIS, myself included, had to sit for many hours in the state house in Entebbe, with its neglected, sagging furniture, while waiting for an audience with President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda" (p.78).

This revelation must be contextualized within the strategic policy shift made by South Africa's diplomats and securocrats in the 1980s to target a group of African states called the Big Five: Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia for intelligence penetration (p.118). The strategic objective of this foray into Black Africa was to drive a wedge between the leaders of these countries and the political leadership of the ANC and to lure the ANC back to South Africa—and ultimately away from its reliance upon guerrilla tactics and visions of overthrowing the South African government—while simultaneously preparing South Africa for the end of Apartheid. Through clandestine contacts with counterpart intelligence agencies, South Africa's NIS conveyed one key message to other nations, namely that South Africa was "moving away from Apartheid and that we wanted to work out a new political dispensation in cooperation with all significant political groups" (p.120). In fact, Barnard rather arrogantly declared, "We are not approaching political reform from a position of weakness. Forget that. The ANC can talk in vain about overthrowing the South African government by force.<sup>1</sup> We are going to reform because it's the right thing to do" (p.120). Barnard also discloses that some African leaders were already not pleased with ANC activities on their territories and were happy to rid themselves of ANC presence: "Some of these countries were fed up with the problems the ANC camps were causing and with the organization's attitude in general, which, included a sense of superiority and a desire to dictate to others" (p.152).

To this reviewer, the most valuable information coming out of Barnard's memoir is his enumeration of the factors that convinced the Apartheid state to commence secret talks with prisoner Mandela. For example, he discloses, "Although international developments offered us a unique time slot, the available time was limited. One aspect of this was Mandela's advanced age; by 1986 he was already 68 years old." He goes on to say, "We realized all too well that if he died a prisoner, it would do incalculable damage and have dire consequences for the entire country. It did not require the wisdom of Solomon to realize that

negotiations taking place in the likely climate of violence in the aftermath of his death would virtually seal our fate” (p.153). He also understood that “with Mandela at the helm of the ANC, there was a good chance that moderation and fairness would prevail in the search for a peaceful resolution to the looming South African revolution”(p.153). It is against this background that Barnard rendered ‘prophetic’ advice to President Botha in May 1988: When Botha instructed his spy chief to head up a small government team to conduct exploratory talks with Mandela of the Black African liberation movement (p. 154), Barnard told Botha,<sup>2</sup> “We. . . have to realize fully what we are in for when we begin to negotiate with Nelson Mandela. The eventual outcome is inevitable, and [it] will be a majority government, with him as president”(p.154). Though it was Botha’s predecessor, P.W. de Klerk,<sup>3</sup> who freed Mandela and other political prisoners and rescinded the ban on the ANC and other organizations that had been proscribed by Apartheid laws, it was Botha who initiated the dynamic of political reform at Barnard’s urging. As for Barnard himself, he went on to develop a very warm personal relationship with Mandela that transcended the transition into majority rule in 1994. Barnard explains:

I always treated Mandela with the greatest respect and esteem not only because he was my fellow man but also because he was so much older than me. I treated him as the future president of the country because it was clear to everyone with a grain of intelligence that this was what he would soon become. (p.224)

Apart from revealing the details of the secret negotiations with Mandela and the ANC, Barnard’s memoir also draws attention to the international politics of South Africa’s nuclear weapons program of the 1970s and offers an inside report into the tripartite negotiations involving Cuba, South Africa, and Angola, which preceded Namibia’s attainment of independence in 1990. The analysis is also rightly historically set against the background of the Perestroika and Glasnost reforms unleashed by the last leader of the former Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. However, I would have liked Barnard to interrogate the “revolutionary solidarity” between the ANC and late Yasser Arafat’s Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which was engaged in armed struggle against ‘Israeli-Zionist expansionism’ in the Middle East at the time. Did cadres from the ANC’s military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), receive guerrilla training organized by the PLO and vice versa? Were members of the Arab League<sup>4</sup> truly committed to the cause of the Black liberation movements, or was there a discrepancy between diplomatic rhetoric and actions? I also wonder if Barnard and his operatives made any clandestine overtures towards Tanzania’s very influential founding president, the late Julius K. Nyerere, who as chairman of the frontline states<sup>5</sup> in the 1970s and 1980s, was the most eloquent advocate of the armed struggle against the Apartheid state.

Despite these unanswered questions, the book contains a treasure trove of valuable information written by an academic who brought into intelligence gathering and analytical work a profound understanding of major concepts in political science. This book is literally un-put-downable. It casts the major actors in the unfolding drama of South Africa’s transition in human dimensions, and one can empathize with all players as they dealt with their fears, biases, and ordinary human flaws within highly volatile national, regional, and international contexts. This is a classic text for scholars, diplomats, military strategists, intelligence operatives, and other interested persons who seek to grasp the inner dynamics of the tumultuous political process that enabled South Africa to avert a racial bloodbath as the country transitioned from Apartheid to a non-racial democracy in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Barnard commands my enduring respect and admiration for a very good piece of scholarly work.

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup>Barnard speaks with contempt and disdain when he characterizes the ANC's military campaign against the South African state as an "abject failure." He asserts, "A myth that the ANC tried to keep intact is that thanks to the actions of the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), it defeated the South African government militarily. This is pure nonsense. Planting bombs in Wimpy or landmines on a deserted farm road or opening fire as APLA members did with AK 47s on a church congregation and then running away cannot be seen as military conquests" (p.168).

<sup>2</sup>Contrary to the widely held view that Botha was an implacable foe of both the ANC and Mandela, it was Botha who recognized the urgency and inevitability of political negotiations with Mandela. In fact, Barnard demonstrates in his memoir that Botha and Mandela enjoyed a good personal chemistry.

<sup>3</sup>Barnard's memoir also sheds light on the 1989 Palace Coup, which ousted Botha and ushered into power de Klerk (p. 204). Barnard describes in detail how Botha suffered a stroke in 1989 and how a small cabal of cabinet ministers who were unhappy with Botha's rather authoritarian leadership style plotted while Botha was convalescing to replace him with an individual who was perceived to have the will to accelerate the tempo of political reform in the late 1980s.

<sup>4</sup>The Arab League had a solidarity pact with the OAU, which resulted in the controversial UN General Assembly Resolution of 1975, which equated Zionism with Apartheid/racism.

<sup>5</sup>The Frontline States (FLS) were a loose coalition of African countries from the 1960s to the early 1990s committed to ending *apartheid* and white minority rule in South Africa and Zimbabwe(Rhodesia). The FLS included Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The FLS disbanded after Nelson Mandela became President of South Africa in 1994

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