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African Intelligence Services is a welcome and much needed addition to the global study of intelligence and security services since most research on intelligence services covers European and North American organizations. The book begins with a helpful overview of the research on the topic. The introduction focuses on a number of themes and challenges between the African intelligence services surveyed in this edited volume. Early on the editor offers the raison d’être for the book, noting that the “book’s objective is to introduce readers to different African intelligence services by looking at early postcolonial and contemporary challenges” (p. 6). In his comprehensive introduction, Ryan Shaffer asserts that “There is no single African intelligence service type, but many different types shaped by diverse cultural, economic, historical, religious, and political factors” (p. 7). The book is organized around eleven chapters written by experts in the field. Taken together, they offer the most comprehensive research on African intelligence services to date by taking “a broad view of what constitutes an intelligence and security service” (p. 8). The scholars who contributed chapters used a variety of sources and methodologies, including archival, field, and text research. The eleven chapters are organized in chronological order. The first half examines postcolonial intelligence services, beginning with Kenya’s postcolonial Special Branch, which mainly “continued colonial structures” left in place by the British (p. 23).

In the first chapter, Ryan Shaffer uses archives from Kenya and the United Kingdom as well as published primary sources to chronicle the era of
Kenyan transition to nationhood in the 1960s, a period where the intelligence services were “Africanized.” During the 1960s the government had an opportunity to move on from the Special Branch model inculcated by the British, but kept the same structure for the most part. Kenya was a one-party state with power concentrated in the hands of the president and ultimately the Special Branch which often operated as a tool for government permanency, ensuring the leaders’ and party’s continuity “through detentions without trial and torture...The fear of Special Branch is what made it powerful” (p. 38).

The second chapter focuses on Zanzibar and Tanganyika between 1962 and 1972. Simon Graham examines the competition between the two Germanies in terms of foreign policy in the region and various intelligence concerns. What distinguishes this chapter is the discussion of the relationship between the East German Stasi and the government of Abeid Karume, who was assassinated in 1972. His death ended the special relationship with East Germany, as the new administration favored collaboration with China instead. The author makes excellent use of the Stasi Records Agency (BStU) in Berlin to evaluate how the competition between East Berlin and Bonn influenced intelligence services in Tanganyika and Zanzibar.

In Chapter three, Owen Stirrs chronicles the transitions of Angola and Mozambique from Portuguese colonies to independent nations and the impact of the Soviet Bloc Security Services on the birth of the intelligence communities in both countries after independence. Compared to other colonized African countries, once the Portuguese ended its overseas empire and withdrew from Africa the new countries began with “clean slates,” meaning once the Portuguese “civilian, military and intelligence bureaucracy went home” few vestiges of their existence were left behind (p. 69). Viewing the transition through a Cold war lens, Stirrs asserts that the Soviet Union, Cuban, and East German intelligence services had a lasting impact on the new nations’ intelligence communities. Moreover, he convincingly demonstrates how Portugal, “unlike the United Kingdom and
France” abandoned the countries, leaving a vacuum that the Soviet Bloc easily exploited as they shaped the new intel agencies.

In Chapter 4, Glenn A. Cross examines Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by detailing Rhodesian intelligence responses to growing conflict against minority rule between 1965 and 1980. Initially, the colony had no official agencies responsible for state security. The author found that the small intel service had limited resources but still successfully collected actionable intelligence. Surprisingly, the intelligence services did not play key roles in resolving the conflict. One of the important contributions of this chapter is its use as a case study to demonstrate “the role and limits intelligence has in counterinsurgencies” (p. 91). In any case, it was the rise in violent African nationalist groups that ultimately led to the formation of the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) “to direct the nation’s intelligence collection and analysis efforts” in late 1963 (p. 97).

The second half of the book analyzes the legacy of colonial intel services. In Chapter 5, John Burton Kegel describes Rwandan intelligence following independence, with particular attention to how regionalism and ethnicity shaped postcolonial intel officers’ actions that ultimately destabilized the country. Moreover, he argues that select officers used their positions and knowledge to undermine the Rwandan government due to regional politics and that instability unleashed ethnic forces linked to the 1994 genocide. Ultimately, the intelligence services after independence in 1962 “played a significant role in destabilizing the government, undermining peace negotiations, and creating the environment for the 1994 genocide” (p. 121).

In Chapter six, Benjamin J. Spatz and Alex Bollfrass “analyze the role of intel in neo-patrimonial political systems, the dominant mode of governance across Africa.” Having conducted fieldwork in Liberia, they describe form, function, and transformations of the country’s intel services and their relation to political imperatives. They find intelligence is “not inherently more politicized in neo-patrimonial systems” (p. 156). The authors suggest that due to an absence of historical data, “namely rare
access to files of secret services,” the “field skews toward the relatively open American and British intelligence experiences” (p. 143).

In Chapter 7, Joseph Fitsanakis and Shannon Brophy chronicle the history of Sudan’s intelligence services following British colonial rule. They chart the transformation from a civilian service with an effective HUMINT network that reflected the diverse ethnic population to a more securitized system that supported an autocratic leader. The chapter is notable for its coverage of political shifts in Sudan between 1890 and the present day. More recently, critics of the Sudanese intelligence network have focused on its abysmal human rights record.

Tshepo Gwatiwa and Lesego Tsholofelo, in chapter 8, explore the historical influences on the institutional design and politicization of the Directorate of Intelligence and Security (DIS) in Botswana, “one of Africa’s most stable democracies” (p. 189). The authors chart the development of the country’s intelligence services beginning under the British in 1923. Following independence in 1966 the intelligence services became increasingly politicized, due in no small part to legal and political loopholes that facilitated the elites’ ability to game the system. Moreover, the chapter explores the abuses of the intel services and show how the DIS’s institutional culture continued to morph between 2008 and 2018. The authors explore the relationship between the historical, legal, and social contexts in which the intelligence services developed to give the reader a better understanding of how intelligence has been used to undermine the political opposition and critics of the government.

In Chapter 9, Kevin A. O’Brien surveys South African intelligence before and after the apartheid period. Historically, intelligence “was skewed...if not intertwined with, the political drivers and motivations of the day” (p. 209). During the apartheid era the government directed the intelligence developed by the security services and its “securocrats (civil servants, intelligence, military, and police officials involved in security policies and decision making)” to counter liberation movements. He argues that
intelligence, “as product, process, and institution” has been continually misused and corrupted. O’Brien demonstrates how the transition of “intelligence dispensation from authoritarianism to democracy” represented a failure as South African intelligence fell victim to factionalism, corruption, mismanagement and politicking” (p. 227).

In Chapter 10, Ibikunle Adeakin examines the challenges facing intelligence in Nigeria after decades of military rule, with particular attention paid to intelligence laws and practice since 1999 and the end of the military government. He argues that the legacy of intelligence during military rule provided intelligences services with a lack of accountability that the country’s leaders are unwilling to abandon. Nigeria’s intelligence apparatus has most often served those in power, “whether under colonial, military, or civilian rule” (p. 250).

In Chapter 11, Christopher E. Bailey analyzes constitutional and statutory law in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania in order to better understand the legal frameworks in East Africa that started out having similar colonial intel, security and police service structures. This comparative chapter argues that Uganda has the weakest legal structure, and Kenya, despite abuses, has the strongest and most thorough laws.

This book is an important contribution to the study of intelligence systems. It is aimed at scholars, those involved in intelligence and security, and students of homeland security and terrorism studies. Likewise, it is essential reading for anyone interested in how security services developed in Africa since colonization and the Cold War. Hopefully, it will lead to more extensive research on other African intelligence networks.