

**Cilliers, Jakkie and Markus Reichardt, eds. About Turn: The Transformation of the South African Military and Intelligence. Halfway House, SA: Institute for Defence Policy, 1995.**

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**Cilliers, Jakkie and Markus Reichardt, eds.** *About Turn: The Transformation of the South African Military and Intelligence*. Halfway House, SA: Institute for Defence Policy, 1995.

The critical, if controversial, role South Africa's armed forces and intelligence services played in the retention of power in white hands for so many years naturally raises questions about the status of these institutions in a post-1994 election environment. Readers of *About Turn* will be interested to learn that most of the agencies under review, though reconfigured to reflect a more equitable racial balance, have survived to help lend stability to the country as it attempts to establish more democratic traditions.

The book's eleven chapters examine such issues as the country's most recent defence concerns, its intelligence apparatus under de Klerk and Mandela, the stunning failure of the National Peacekeeping Force, sketches of the liberation forces at work before the transition, or transformation, to black majority rule, and the uneasy relationship that has evolved between the Organization of African Unity and the Southern African Development Community.

There may be a fair amount of literature available about the democratization of South Africa after 1994, but little of any depth has been written about the themes enumerated above, particularly along the intelligence lines, so *About Turn* comes as a welcome addition. Unfortunately, the book has an uneven quality to it. Some pieces are quite good, like Reichardt and Cilliers' accounts of the homeland armies and the evolution of Armscor, Tom Lodge's profile of the Azanian People's Liberation Army and Robert D'A Henderson's look at South Africa's pre-independence intelligence services; but other submissions suffer from a lack of clarity and are difficult to follow, such as Mark Shaw's examination of the country's new defence obligations, which has a kind of edgy, abrupt style to it, and Tsepe Motumi's lightly researched piece on the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), or Spear of the Nation.

In fact, in view of the enormous number of underlined terms and abbreviations used (there is a four-page glossary with which to contend), as well as numerous charts, tables and figures to wade through, this is not an easy book for the non-specialist to read. These data certainly do help illustrate some points, as we see in the chapter on public opinion on defence and security issues, but all too often, an acronym or abbreviation is used once and then never heard from again. Moreover, a few articles seem to be an unfocused series of bullets, making them read more like a collection of facts than a narrative in which these points are blended. At the same time, the specialist will appreciate neither the lack of an index nor the fact that many of the articles are drawn almost exclusively from secondary sources. Indeed, in two pieces the authors use no footnotes at all, just bibliographies at the end. An intrinsic weakness with such a methodology, of course, is that the reader is left unable to explore premises he may find dubious. A notable exception to this is Kevin O'Brien's discussion of South Africa's new intelligence environment, in which he relies on a number of white papers and official acts to describe how the National Intelligence Agency, as the successor to the National Intelligence

Service, has been tasked to carry out domestic counter-intelligence and counter-terrorism operations.

*About Turn* could stand to be reedited if a second edition is published, but the reader, nevertheless, will get a good idea about how the defence and intelligence establishments have gone from preserving the status quo of white supremacy to that of the new state polity since independence. This was no mean feat and a number of officials in the government and armed forces fell by the wayside because they were unable or unwilling to make the requisite adjustments. *About Turn* helps explain why South Africa is stronger for having survived the ordeal.

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