

BOOK SUMMARY



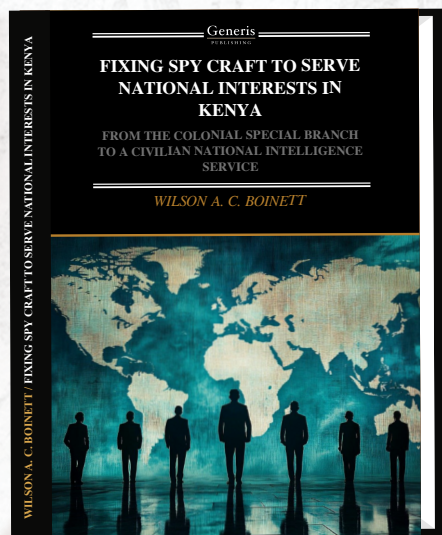
THE GLOBAL CENTRE FOR POLICY AND STRATEGY
(GLOCEPS)

FIXING SPY CRAFT TO SERVE NATIONAL INTERESTS IN KENYA:

FROM THE COLONIAL SPECIAL BRANCH TO A CIVILIAN NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

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**THE GLOBAL CENTRE FOR POLICY AND STRATEGY
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One of the most anxious parts of a soldier's professional journey is to serve as a Brigadier in the Kenya Army, in-charge of Military Intelligence and on your way to a distant town to take over an armored brigade command, you receive a call from your superior, directing you to immediately return and report to the Office of the Chief of General Staff (CGS) for unclear reasons. But the anxiety gets thicker when a few hours later you are asked to drop your military attire for an urgent appointment with the Head of State of the Republic of Kenya. This scenario captures the surprise with which Brigadier (Rtd) Wilson A. C. Boinett stepped into the shadows of the leadership of Kenya's Intelligence Service. It is the beginning of his transformative journey when he is appointed the Director of Intelligence (DI) of the then Special Branch (SB), a world, where spycraft shapes a nation's survival. It marks the launching pad for his vision to transform a feared relic of the colonial regime into a modern guardian service.

In Fixing Spy Craft to Serve National Interests in Kenya: From the Colonial Special Branch to a Civilian National Intelligence Service, Brigadier (Rtd) Wilson A. C. Boinett takes you on a gripping journey through decades of espionage, reform, and resilience. This is not just an ordinary memoir, it is a front-row seat to the making of modern Kenya, told by an insider who has dared to rewrite its security story.

Boinett's voice is both commanding and candid, like that of a trusted storyteller. In the book, he blends the gravitas of a military commander and the sensitivity of an intelligence chief with the warmth of a family patriarch. He begins his narration from his surprise appointment in 1995 as Director of Intelligence. An army man thrust into the police's murky Special Branch, to his leadership in crafting the National Security Intelligence Service (NSIS), revealing the high-stakes world of statecraft with unflinching honesty. From Nyati House, the agency's nerve center, where he faced suspicion from police veterans who eyed him as an interloper, you can feel the tension of his 90-day limbo before taking charge, the weight of reforming a distrusted agency, and the pride of building a professional outfit under Kenya's Presidents Daniel Arap Moi and Emilio Mwai Kibaki. His anecdotes like navigating State House politics as Moi's aide-de-camp or facing parliamentary battles over the NSIS Act, bring history to life with vivid detail.

What makes this book engrossing is its blend of personal grit and national stakes; his triumphs and disappointments. Boinett does not shy away from failures such as the 1997 bill's rejection or the fog of terrorist attacks in 1998 and 2002. Instead, he shows how each setback fueled his mission to align intelligence with Kenya's democratic dreams. The memoir also unveils Kenya's hidden history: precolonial spies, colonial suppression, Cold War intrigues, and the Mau Mau's shadow. It is a story of a nation

finding its footing, with intelligence as its unseen pulse.

For readers, *Fixing Spy Craft* is a thrilling ride through a world rarely seen. Historians will savour its helicopter perspective on Kenya's security evolution, its sweep on Kenya's intelligence from pre-colonial "Segeik" spies to colonial oppression, Mau Mau crackdowns, and Cold War intrigues. Of interest too would be Boinett's insider take on events, like the 1982 coup attempt and the 1999 Ocalan case, a Kurdish leader's capture in Nairobi.

While policymakers will find wisdom in its call for regional intelligence networks to unite against modern threats like cyber-terrorism; general readers will connect with Boinett's patriotism as he honours Kenya's unsung heroes, the intelligence community. But both of them will resonate with his universal themes of resilience, as he navigates retirement as well as his leadership vision, as he tames the "change monster". At its heart, this is a story of the transformation of an institution, a leader, and a nation. As you laugh with Boinett at his wry observations, be prepared to hold your breath during covert operations, and cheer as he hands over a stronger NSIS in 2006. His farewell speech to a tearful NSIS audience is a masterclass in grace, urging them to uphold the motto: Capable, Available, Reliable.

Tonight, at this launch, you are not just stumbling upon a book, you are encountering a legacy. Grab *Fixing Spy Craft to Serve National Interests in Kenya*, dive into its pages, and discover how one man's courage has shaped Kenya's future. Whether you're a history buff, a security enthusiast, or simply curious, this memoir will keep you riveted, inspired, and proud to be part of Kenya's story.



K.O. ASEMBO, PhD, OGW, HSC
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
THE GLOBAL CENTRE FOR POLICY AND STRATEGY

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Chapter 1: A Surprise Call

The chapter begins with Boinett's unexpected 1995 appointment as Director of Intelligence. He receives an unexpected call while en route to assume a military command. He is summoned to State House where President Moi informs him of his appointment. Though deemed an outsider, coming from the military, his appointment signifies the trust placed upon him to lead the Special Branch, the Directorate of Security Intelligence (DSI), and this marks the beginning of his involvement in Kenya's intelligence reforms. The tense State House meeting with President Moi reveals the urgency of reforming the Special Branch but hints at political motives. One cannot help but ask why Moi chose an outsider and contemplate the challenges that awaited Boinett in the role.

Chapter 2: Delayed Start

Rumors of his appointment's reversal swirl, fueled by lobbying from the outgoing director's allies. Will Boinett overcome the resistance, or will he be sidelined before he begins? Boinett's 90-day delay before assuming office tests his resilience, offering a chance to study the Special Branch's troubled legacy. He recounts his challenging first day at the DSI. His arrival is met with bureaucratic resistance and an uncoordinated welcome, symbolizing the institutional reluctance to accept his leadership. Rumors of the appointment's possible reversal and the absence of a proper handover signal the deep-rooted resistance to change. This chapter sets the tone for the initial challenges Boinett faced in his mission to reform Kenya's intelligence system.

Chapter 3: The Making of a Nation

In this chapter, Boinett reviews the Special Branch's colonial roots and post-independence abuses, all revealing a flawed system of Kenya's troubled political past. He highlights significant intelligence failures and reflects on major events such as the assassinations of Tom Mboya and JM Kariuki, the 1971 and 1982 coup d'états, and political repression. These failures exposed the weaknesses in the intelligence apparatus, contributing to instability and governance issues. Boinett emphasizes the need for a robust, transparent intelligence system to avoid repeating past mistakes, such as the use of the agency to prop up political elites, not to serve national interests. Will Boinett break the entrenched paradigm without alienating powerful insiders?

Chapter 4: Becoming Ayabei

This chapter provides Boinett's background, from his upbringing to his formative years in the military, a background that sparks suspicion among police veterans, challenging his leadership. He details his experiences as President Moi's Aide-de-Camp, a role that shaped his understanding of national leadership and governance. His exposure to the

inner workings of the State House and Kenya's political landscape prepared him for the leadership challenges at the DSI, giving him valuable insights into managing power and influence. By adopting the cover name “Ayabei” and embracing his outsider status, will he win his colleague’s trust, or remain a stranger in his own agency?

Chapter 5: The Iron Snake is Coming

Boinett explores Kenya's precolonial intelligence systems, where indigenous communities relied on native spy networks, and intelligence structures which were crucial in local defense and governance. The infrastructure was systematically dismantled by colonial forces, but not before the sophistication of local espionage, such as that of the Nandi’s “Segeik” spies who outmaneuvered early British forces, was registered. The British colonial administration replaced them with a Western intelligence framework focused on securing the colony and suppressing African resistance, setting the foundation for Kenya’s modern intelligence structures. How the colonial powers neutralised these networks, and the lessons therein still linger for modern intelligence.

Chapter 6: Securing the Colony

This chapter examines the expansion of colonial intelligence operations during the establishment of the Kenya-Uganda railway and subsequent colonial wars. Intelligence gathering was pivotal in suppressing opposition and securing British interests. The colonial administration fortified its intelligence capabilities to deal with internal and external threats, gradually embedding intelligence in the fabric of governance and colonial power structures in Kenya. The colonial intelligence template was one of the structures that Boinett set out to overturn. A number of hidden colonial practices shaped Kenya’s early security.

Chapter 7: The War Will Be Won by Our Special Branch

The Special Branch’s role in suppressing the Mau Mau uprising cemented its fearsome reputation. Intelligence operations, often using repressive tactics and lacking accountability, were critical to the British campaign. These methods, brutal interrogation tactics, while effective for the colonial agenda, alienated communities and planted the seeds of distrust and fear that persisted in the post-independence intelligence framework. These issues needed to be addressed. Boinett’s role was to establish how deep the scars left by colonial methods were and how they could be healed.

Chapter 8: Templer’s Template

Boinett introduces the British Cold War-inspired intelligence strategy known as “Templer’s Template”. This model emphasized multi-agency coordination, intelligence-led security planning, and the establishment of joint intelligence committees. It became the foundation for Kenya’s intelligence strategies during the Cold War, focusing on counterinsurgency and internal security, while aligning with Western interests in the global ideological conflict. A secret British memo reveals plans to control Kenyan elites, shaping post-independence intelligence. How would Boinett confront these stratagems?

Chapter 9: Domesticating the Cold War

Post-independence Kenya inherits a colonial intelligence framework, aligning with Western Cold War interests. Intelligence priorities shifted to countering perceived communist threats, often neglecting domestic governance issues. A covert operation exposed Soviet influence attempts, testing Kenya's young agency. Kenya's intelligence services, influenced by Western Cold War imperatives, played a key role in suppressing dissent and reinforcing the political status quo, further distancing themselves from the public's trust and national interests. Meanwhile, in balancing superpower pressures, Kenya faced some risks.

Chapter 10: Game Change

The Cold War's end shifts global intelligence priorities, forcing Kenya to rethink its security strategy. Moreover, Kenya faces emerging, complex security threats, including ethnic violence, political assassinations, and the Goldenberg corruption scandal. Boinett highlights how the intelligence community struggled to adapt to these multifaceted challenges. The events exposed the limitations of the existing intelligence structures and underscored the urgent need for institutional reforms to protect national interests and ensure democratic accountability. Since Boinett's appointment coincides with Western allies reevaluating their support for Kenya, will Boinett adapt the agency to this new world order, or will it falter?

Chapter 11: A Fresh Start

Boinett outlines a roadmap to transform the Special Branch into a civilian NSIS, facing internal resistance. He underscores how resilience, clarity of purpose, and mapping a reform strategy are vital to institutional transformation. Boinett begins his transformative leadership journey at the DSI by meeting the Principal Intelligence Customer, President Moi. The president articulates his views on how and what he wanted to be done by DSI. He outlines the critical role of the DSI in the national security strategy process and the need for its impact to be felt across the country and beyond. Afterwards, Boinett is sworn into office, where he isolates himself to reflect on the path ahead for Kenya's intelligence service. He constructs a clear roadmap for reforming the DSI, grounded in professionalism, strategic planning, and a clear alignment with national interests. His intended reforms are geared towards transforming DIS to be more centered on intelligence and human security. His vision even goes to the extent of carrying out a kind of SWOT analysis to identify possible threats and opportunities. A leaked memo reveals senior officers plotting to sabotage reforms.

Chapter 12: Back-Channel Diplomacy

The chapter focuses on addressing the threat of FERA (February Eighteen Revolutionary Army), a quasi-insurgent group that operated in Kenya but later developed links in Uganda. Boinett convinces President Moi for DSI to use back-channel diplomacy to engage Uganda's intelligence chief and navigate tensions between Kenya and Uganda in dealing with FERA. The chapter shows how covert diplomacy prevented a potential border conflict and helped dismantle FERA's influence highlighting diplomacy as an

effective tool in intelligence work. The change of modus operandi from traditional hard approaches to diplomatic intelligence tactics brought about by Boinett's leadership sets the pace for changes in DSI.

Chapter 13: The Change Monster is Inside

Now formally in office, Boinett describes his internal battles with resistance from within the DSI. He faces opposition as an “outsider” but establishes authority by engaging senior management and articulating the urgency of change. His taking charge marked a change of environment. It was no longer business as usual. It marked the beginning of responsibility, authority, and accountability to every member of the agency. His vision was supported by three components. First, there was a need for change in DSI. Second, DSI had to enable the country to advance its national interests and be the first among equals in the international arena. Third the DSI had to become a people-centered organization thereby enhancing its legitimacy and trust amongst the Kenyan populace. To do this, Boinett took a non-partisan approach and set immediate to mid-long-term goals to enable him to achieve his vision. It was a move from strategy to action. The chapter reveals that successful reform requires internal buy-in, consultative processes, a clear vision, and leaders who are ready to confront institutional inertia.

Chapter 14: Thinking Civilian

The chapter is pivotal in framing intelligence as a tool of governance rather than control, calling for a paradigm shift in institutional culture and outlook. Here, Boinett argues that Kenya's intelligence services must shift from a militarized mindset to a civilian one. He reaffirms that a good foreign policy is rooted in a good domestic policy. For Kenya to project national power, be competitive, and be secure in the international arena, DSI had to be transformed into a civilian organization. Colonial security structures embedded in DSI had to be dismantled as they were incompatible with the then-modern sovereign Kenya. DSI structures and decision-making processes had to reflect the reality of Kenyan citizenry and avert new threats from within and outside the country. Given the missed opportunities before, it was urgent to restructure. This could only be achieved through professionalizing staff, ensuring budgetary independence, and securing tenure for officers. Equally, the chapter highlights that when carrying out institutional reforms, resistance from within the organization and outsiders with vested interests is expected. Anticipating and mitigating these is therefore crucial.

Chapter 15: Saving the Bill: A Balancing Act

This chapter deals with the political hurdles in passing the National Security Intelligence Service (NSIS) Bill. Boinett navigates partisan politics, media scrutiny, and resistance from vested interests. Through strategic lobbying and reframing the bill as a national necessity rather than a partisan tool, he succeeds in garnering support. Boinett set up a steering committee in 1997 to analyze past parliamentary debates and redraft the bill more strategically. He launched internal change campaigns, including field visits and intelligence bulletin publications, to motivate staff. The chapter portrays political acumen as key in implementing institutional reforms.

Chapter 16: The Emergence of a Professional Outfit

By early 1997, the NSIS begins to take shape, with new structures and improved morale under Boinett's leadership. A young recruit's innovative report impresses foreign allies, signaling NSIS's potential. Feedback loops from field officers to the presidency showed better analysis, which informed public speeches and decisions. Boinett discusses efforts to sideline information peddlers and power brokers, address internal bureaucracy, and professionalize operations. The chapter captures a turning point where the agency begins to distance itself from its colonial legacy and adapt to democratic expectations.

Chapter 17: Keeping Our Secrets Secret

This chapter explores the tension between secrecy and the public's right to know as well as Boinett's efforts at strengthening counterintelligence to protect NSIS from internal and external threats. With the explosion of information in the digital age, Boinett stresses the importance of data security, classification, and discretion. The agency also grapples with "spooky clients", untrustworthy informants, and the balance between confidentiality and transparency. Boinett referenced using pop culture like the film *Enemy of the State* to educate staff on modern surveillance. He introduced computerization policies and emphasized that while citizens' right to information is a democratic ideal, it must be balanced with national interest.

Chapter 18: It's a Bomb Blast Your Excellency

The 1998 US Embassy bombing tests NSIS's capabilities, highlighting the urgency of reform. The chapter illustrates the complexity of modern terrorism, highlighting intelligence lapses, the threat of sleeper cells, and the need for improved inter-agency collaboration. A walk-in source had warned of a western target and drawn sketches but without actionable follow-up. The bombing led to rushed inter-agency cooperation and exposed flaws in liaison systems. This tragedy becomes a sobering moment that reaffirms the urgency of reform.

Chapter 19: The Future is Here

Following the crisis, the NSIS Act is approved, formalizing the transformation. A retreat at Lake Bogoria helps align leadership on reforms. Boinett discusses the appointment of the first Director-General, marking the beginning of a civilian-led intelligence service. The chapter underscores the importance of legal frameworks in institutional legitimacy.

Chapter 20: Recruiting the Paradigm Pioneers

This chapter focuses on building a new team that embodies the reformed agency's values. It covers recruitment processes, the challenges of changing internal culture, and lessons from the Abdullah Ocalan incident. Boinett initiated a thorough recruitment process starting from the top, creating new ranks like Directors and Deputies. A recruitment tribunal with the Public Service Commission (PSC) and the Directorate of Personnel Management (DPM) oversight ensured transparency. However, the recruitment process was fraught with challenges, as the newly formed institution required fresh leadership and thinkers who could drive the new vision forward. Compartmentalization becomes key in

managing sensitive operations. The chapter emphasizes the complexity of selecting the right people, managing expectations, and ensuring that the organization can weather the challenges of its inception while navigating the political and institutional tensions that arose.

Chapter 21: Strengthening the Institution

Boinett consolidates early gains by fostering team spirit and institutional identity. The NSIS built on legislative legitimacy by reforming internal structures. Directors were tasked with implementing new schemes of service, medical/pension plans, and standard operating procedures. Weekly physical exercises were introduced, influenced by Boinett's military background, to instill resilience and discipline. Weekly operational meetings became a space to reinforce the commitment to transformation. Importantly, the strategy emphasized system-wide change rather than piecemeal reforms to avoid internal friction. Strengthening the institution also involved ensuring that staff members felt a sense of ownership and responsibility for the new direction of the service and overcoming the doubts and fears of those who felt alienated by the reforms. The institution begins to stabilize, though not without pushback from doubters. The chapter shows the importance of morale and unity in organizational resilience.

Chapter 22: The (2002) Political Transition

Amid the 2002 political transition, the intelligence service must remain neutral and vigilant. The chapter examines how the NSIS monitored political shifts while maintaining professionalism. It's a study of navigating uncertainty and demonstrates how intelligence institutions can play a stabilizing role during regime changes. NSIS remained apolitical during Kenya's historic transition of power. The service produced high-quality, unbiased intelligence reports to both President Moi and the opposition, including threat assessments of potential unrest. Boinett also played a behind-the-scenes role in advising Moi to initiate a peaceful handover, which prevented national chaos and earned bipartisan support. The agency's credibility and neutrality were pivotal to stability during this transition.

Chapter 23: Exiting and Adjusting

Boinett prepares to leave office, reflecting on his journey and the institutional reforms he helped realize. He emphasizes leadership succession, the need for continued reform, and the dangers of complacency. His transition contrasted with his entry, which lacked order. He ensured that his successor, Brigadier Michael Gichangi, had a smooth onboarding supported by institutional continuity. This chapter is reflective, personal, and underscores that reform is a continuous journey and not a one-off event. This chapter also underscores the importance of exit planning, institutional memory, and leadership maturity in sustaining reforms. It highlights the importance of leaving behind a legacy to sustain the transformation efforts and grooming future leaders to carry the institution forward.

Chapter 24: The Intelligence War and the Future

Boinett underscores that terrorism is an intelligence war, with Kenya facing threats from both physical and virtual actors. He calls for the creation of a regional intelligence architecture to combat transnational terrorism, addressing challenges such as

inter-agency mistrust and cyber vulnerabilities. Boinett also tackles the controversial definition of terrorism, acknowledging that it's politicized and subjective, and proposes a shift from excessive secrecy to managed openness for better coordination with regional and international actors.

Chapter 25: Intelligence and Future Prospects

This chapter begins by reaffirming intelligence as a core government function, emphasizing its five stages: requirements, collection, analysis, dissemination, and use in policymaking. Boinett warns of future complexities including urbanization, ungoverned spaces, radicalization, and digital overload that will reshape the intelligence battlefield. It highlights the need for the intelligence service to adapt its methods to integrate new technologies while maintaining its core national security mission. He stresses that Kenya's National Intelligence Service must operate with resilience, flexibility, and digital literacy, and that future threats will require inter-agency coordination and regional cooperation to manage security risks posed by both state and non-state actors.

Chapter 26: National Security & Decision-Making Processes

Boinett outlines a comprehensive national security strategy that includes five pillars: intelligence, interoperability, force structure, preventive diplomacy, and national security. He reflects on the virtual state and the rise of cybersecurity threats, where small actors can have outsized impacts. The author emphasizes that intelligence is not just about collecting information; it is about ensuring that information is timely, accurate, and actionable to help leaders avoid costly mistakes, and to align national decisions with constitutional and democratic values. He also emphasizes that information asymmetry in the digital age complicates traditional statecraft and demands faster, more precise decision-making. The chapter underscores the need for policymakers to trust and utilize the intelligence community while ensuring that decisions are based on sound and evidence-driven analysis.

Chapter 27: Oversighting Intelligence

This final chapter Boinett stresses that effective oversight ensures NSIS serves the nation, not narrow interests, through constitutional checks. He champions the idea that intelligence should be subject to robust democratic oversight without compromising operational secrecy. Boinett proposes a layered approach: parliamentary oversight, internal checks by "spy catchers," and external watchdog roles by the media, the public, and the executive. He cautions against exposing budgetary details, arguing that such transparency could jeopardize national security operations. Instead, Boinett advocates for strict adherence to the Constitution and NSIS Act, term limits for intelligence chiefs, and meritocratic recruitment to insulate the service from political manipulation.



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