



Secrets of State

Matthew Palmer

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An NPR Best Book of the Year

From a veteran insider with over twenty years' experience in the U.S. Foreign Service comes a taut, insightful thriller of global intrigue and behind-the-scenes international politics.

Sam Trainor's career of overseas work coupled with a penchant for being outspoken has left him on the outside of the competitive Washington establishment. Formerly the top South Asia expert in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Trainor has moved to the private sector, working as an analyst for the consulting firm Argus Systems.

But Sam soon discovers that for all their similarities, the government and their hired contractors have vastly different motives. As he struggles to adjust to a more corporate, profit-driven version of the work that had been his life, he stumbles across an intelligence anomaly—the transcript of a phone conversation about the fastest ways to upend the delicate political balance keeping India and Pakistan from all-out war. Yet Sam knows that conversation can't have occurred—because he is having an affair with one of the alleged participants.

As he digs into the source of this misinformation, he realizes that more is at stake than just bad intel. Someone is deliberately twisting the intelligence to stoke the simmering conflict between India and Pakistan, nuclear-armed rivals that have already fought multiple wars. And Sam's new employer could be up to its neck in it.

Secrets of State Details

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Author : Matthew Palmer

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From Reader Review Secrets of State for online ebook

Tim says

Palmer is a good writer, weaving together a tale that invites readers into his created universe. I enjoyed the background knowledge about India and Pakistan relations, written in both an informative and entertaining manner. This is the second of his books I've read and I look forward to others.

Bob says

Entertaining And Informative Thriller!

Without going into details of the plot, which can be read about in the Goodreads Book Description, I'll just say that Secrets Of State is an entertaining and informative thriller that pertains to a potential nuclear war between India and Pakistan that may be instigated by a group within the Washington, D.C. area.

Palmer, a 20-year veteran within the U.S. Foreign Service (and the son of bestselling author, Michael Palmer), makes his knowledge of international politics and intrigue clearly evident in his second thriller. Secrets Of State slowly builds into a complex exciting page-turner, with pretty well-developed characters, interesting locales and enough plot twists to keep you in suspense about who the "white hats" are and who are the "black hats." Having said this, I should point out that a few times I found some elements within Secrets Of State seemed a bit hard to believe but that didn't really detract from my enjoyment. Further, I wish that Palmer could made his hero reach "first and second base" a little faster than it took him; but he had no problem getting his hero to "round third and reach home plate" at above average speed.

I enjoyed Secret Of State and recommend it to those who enjoy international suspense thrillers and political thrillers. I now plan to go back and read Palmer's first thriller, The American Mission.

Imran Ahmed says

Secrets of State, a novel written by former US diplomat Matthew Palmer, is a sophisticated work of fiction. In his book Palmer weaves together a believable plot involving an US and Indian 'deep state' conspiracy to militarily destroy Pakistan. The story involves some classy character development, beginning with the main protagonist Sam Trainor.

The plot has ultra-nationalist patriots in the US and Indian collaborate to launch a (false flag?) nuclear attack on an Indian city in order to provoke an Indian military attack aimed at destroying Pakistan (once and for all). For the Americans, the motive is to 'protect' the world by preventing Pakistani nukes from following into the wrong hands, i.e. Islamic extremist terrorists.

Through chance, coincidence or synchronicity a retired US South Asia specialist, Sam Trainor, gets a whiff of the plot and starts investigating through his network of Washington contacts. Pretty soon Trainor finds himself in hot waters and realizes he is onto something big.

Meanwhile, his clandestine love interest – an Indian diplomat at her country's US mission – and his daughter – a do-gooder, socially conscious, young half-Indian woman doing development work in the slums of Mumbai – both find themselves sucked into the terrorist plot.

Despite what appears to be a far-fetched series of events, Palmer does a good job piecing the story together. He even adds some historical 'make believe' stories from time to time to give the novel greater believability. It works.

Events in *Secrets of State* move quickly. The reader is kept in suspense and will hardly notice the length (437 pages) of the novel.

To be sure, the author cashed in on post 9/11 conventional wisdom which conveniently placed every international terrorist incident at Pakistan's doorstep. Nonetheless, *Secrets of State* is more nuanced than many post 9/11 'terrorist' thrillers. Palmer's fiction is a good addition to the genre. Anyone who enjoys a good geo-political thriller will find *Secrets of State* a good read.

NB -In the aftermath of 9/11, if an American in Washington DC caught the flu, it must have been a conspiracy involving biological weapons hatched in Pakistan's governed tribal areas! Likewise, if a firecracker exploded unannounced on the streets of London it was an Islamic extremist attack planned and plotted by Pakistanis!

Liz says

This was a really fun read, and I'm not saying that just because I know Matt Palmer. Although I am partially saying it because I rarely get to see Foreign Service Officers in print, and Matt's novels star FSOs doing more than writing and clearing cables and checking our outdated Blackberries. I didn't think this book was quite as riveting as his first, set in Congo, but it was still a fun read with constant action. There was a bit much explanation of inside-the-Beltway details and particular Foreign Service details, but maybe that stuff is interesting to people (or maybe it's not...)

Mark Rubinstein says

Secrets of State is Matthew Palmer's second novel. As the son of the late Michael Palmer, writing is certainly in his DNA. In this novel, government analyst Sam Trainor has left his position and now works for Argus Security, a private consulting company. Struggling to adjust to a corporate version of what has been his life's work, he stumbles across a strange bit of intelligence: the transcript of a telephone conversation suggesting the delicate balance between India and Pakistan could be deliberately overturned. Digging deeper, Sam is faced with the chilling reality that something far worse than misleading or "bad" intel is in the offing: nuclear war between two South Asian giants. With the world's balance threatening to be overturned, the clock ticks. A gripping read about what could go drastically wrong in today's world of nuclear powers and flash-points. A 5-star read for those who love international thrillers.

Mark Rubinstein

♥ Sue says

As readers, we empathize with characters in books and become more empathetic in life as a result.

In "Secrets of State," by Mathew Palmer, we meet Sam Trainor, a character written on the page who sticks with us, and is larger than life. Thus his persona enters the "real world."

Trainor deals with his path of both pain and pleasure, and goes forward by taking the next step, hill, and mountain. We accept all of him, both his foibles and his short-comings, and his kindnesses and his caring which are at the center of his being.

The "afterlife" of a novel is when the character resonates and intrudes into our thoughts as memorable fiction. "Secrets of State" fits this bill.

Palmer has given life to Sam Trainor and has brought the reader into this celebration. This talented writer has given us a memorable character who has "trained" us to be more compassionate.

{Thank you to Penguin First to Read.}

Cindy says

Liked the plot, twists and cast. Experienced some impatience with the constant "education" in Islam, however I thought the position taken by author in his wrap up was insightful and merited acceptance (it'd be a shame to have wasted our soldiers lives with no follow-thru). Narrated pleasantly and well by Fred Sanders. Recommended.

Barbara says

Thank you to Penguin First to Read for the opportunity to read and review this book by author Matthew Palmer. Palmer is a 27 year veteran of the U.S. Foreign Service, so he knows a thing or two about it. That certainly showed in his telling of the fictional story of Sam Trainor former South Asia expert with the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research and how different he finds working in the private sector of a large, intelligence gathering government contractor. Sam is dating Vanalika an Indian diplomat, of course it's against regulations, but only if they are found out. His daughter Lena is living in, working in and trying to make the Dharavi slums of Mumbai a better place. Sam happens upon some intelligence that seems to suggest that Pakistan and India are heading toward a nuclear war. Can Sam trust what he's seeing, especially since the intelligence involves a phone call from Vanalika to her colleague in India during the time she and Sam were away at small inn in the mountains, completely outside of cell or phone range?

When Sam's trusted friend at State turns up dead after Sam asks for his assistance to use the governments huge database to look for other connections or clues, he realizes that something is going down and time is running out before a major city in India or Pakistan is decimated by the nuclear bomb. As more clues pile up that seem to point to India and Sam is almost killed in a car accident, he realizes the only way to stop India & Pakistan from starting the war is to go to the heart of the matter. This book is a moderately paced espionage

tale intertwined with current events. Author Matthew Palmer understands the hot button issues that plague these two countries and uses them to create an interesting story.

Gary says

A great disappointment. I was drawn to this book because with Matthew Palmer's background with the State Department, I thought he might deliver a plausibly realistic thriller of behind-the-scenes intrigue based on "how things work" in governmental and diplomatic circles. While there is certainly some of that in the details, I felt the air go out of the balloon when it turned out the villains were all part of a conspiratorial elite cartel, ala SPECTRE, which has been manipulating historical events (e.g. the Kennedy assassination) since the American Revolution (!).

Seriously.

And to think that over two centuries, no one ever spilled the beans about this conspiracy's existence.

Turns out, too, that the White House Chief of Staff has developed his own intelligence network so sophisticated an operative of his was able to infiltrate a militant Islamic group. And that, with his boss having only been two years in office!

Besides this, Palmer commits the novice writer's sin of "telling, not showing." Too many times conversation is used to provide big blocks of exposition, e.g. when after making love, a couple talks about the parameters of the India-Pakistan crisis. Real people do not talk like that.

All the elements of a thriller are there--clandestine breaking-and-entering, car chases, henchmen, a folksy informant, even a countdown clock--but because they are all such conventional thriller elements, there's not a lot of tension or surprise. In what is supposed to be a nail-biting sequence at the end, the scene feels so drawn out as to feel "ho-hum." Will the heroes fail? Will there be World War III? Guess.

And of course, there is an epilogue which sets the stage for sequels. If I ever do read them, it will be only to resolve this remaining question for me: Can Matthew Palmer become a better writer?

julianne salverson says

Sound-tingling political thriller

The author's involvement with the State Department provides a realistic framework for what is a very engaging political thriller. He keeps you glued to the action with very authentic characters and situations. A great read for anyone who enjoys mysteries involving world politics.

Jennifer says

Due to be released on 26 May, 2015, *Secrets of the State* by Matthew Palmer is an intense suspense thriller that will take the reader on a taut journey to the brink of war between India and Pakistan, this is a must read

for all who enjoy suspense thrillers. Sam Trainor was the top South Asia expert in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence & Research, but has decided to work outside the government for a Beltway Bandit consulting firm, twice the pay for the same work, at Argus Systems, which will allow him more freedom and he will still be proving key intel to the federal government. It does not take Sam long to discover the vast differences in motivations between the public and private sector, and while trying to adjust he stumbles across intel that could not possibly be true, but could be catastrophic to the delicate balance between India and Pakistan. The more Sam digs into the phony intel the more dangerous the situation becomes. Palmer is quite gifted at crafting political suspense thrillers and *Secrets of the State* just well may be my favorite to date. *Secrets of the State* is superbly written, the plot lines are well constructed and intertwine in unexpected ways, which keeps the reader eagerly turning the pages, his characters are well defined and the story is atmospheric enough for the reader to feel as though they are there with Sam. Palmer's knowledge of international relations and politics creates for a wonderful and realistic story as well as a taut suspenseful thriller and one I highly recommend to readers who enjoy this genre.

Cathy says

The book is an enjoyable political thriller. The author is obviously very familiar with the area, both the geography and the personalities that can be found in and around the DC Metro area.

I don't want to give any details that may spoil the plot for anyone, but suffice it to say that the plot is unnervingly plausible, which I find makes it that much more enjoyable. This book is hard to put down once you get to the meat of the story. The beginning is innocuous enough, almost too slow in my opinion, but that does not last long.

It starts out innocently enough. Another former government worker from DC, now working for a government contractor on the outskirts of the city. That's just the beginning, though. Soon you're sucked into a web of intrigue that reaches across the globe - and that's when you will start losing sleep because you just have to find out what happens next. "Just one more chapter" will become your running mantra at the end of the day, and it will be worth it.

Rachana says

There's a lot of information there and you can tell the author has experience with how these kind of things work. The plot plays out in a pretty straightforward way. No unexpected twists. I felt like the ending was way too easy. The writing is decent.

Michelle Palmer says

A roller coaster ride of international intrigue and behind the scenes manipulation.

A veteran foreign services officer discovers a piece of Intel that doesn't quite make sense, he has a young colleague research similar Intel. Then the young man ends up murdered. This is the beginning of a rollicking ride through the world of the intelligence and foreign service community.

Great characters, outstanding settings, a plot that never stops, and a well written climax. What more could any thriller reader want!

Michael Rhode says

Fun, paranoid read.
