

**Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004). 712 pages.**

When the Soviet Politburo ordered its troops into neighboring Afghanistan in 1979 to prop up a client regime, they expected a swift victory with little reaction from the west. Instead, President Carter ordered the CIA to launch covert operations to support the Afghan resistance. Steve Coll's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Ghost Wars* tells how these two decisions ultimately led to the September 11, 2001, attacks on America. Coll details how the Afghan fight inspired Islamic radicals to gather in Pakistan and organize to carry their *jihad* to the West. He shows, too, how Pakistan's attempts to ensure a friendly regime in Afghanistan propelled the Taliban to power. Al-Qa'ida leader Osama Bin Laden, in turn, exploited his ties with the Taliban to turn Afghanistan into a base for his terrorist campaign against the United States. Finally, Coll details the frantic efforts within the CIA's Counterterrorist Center to track down al-Qa'ida terrorists and prevent the attack that analysts knew was coming.

I recommend *Ghost Wars* as the most complete and accurate account of the roots of the September 11 attacks available today. Quite simply, Coll knows his stuff. He was the *Washington Post* South Asia bureau chief during my diplomatic assignment to Pakistan in the early 1990s. I remember his skill at the time, building ties to U.S. and Pakistani diplomats and intelligence officers. I worked with his sources in the Counterterrorist Center to find al-Qa'ida terrorists and bring them to justice. To this day, no U.S. journalist has demonstrated Coll's access or understanding of the realities of counterterrorism work in the 1990s. I recommend *Ghost Wars* to my students for the grounding it offers in the rise of Islamic terror and for the portrait it offers of intelligence officers' lives. Most of all, I recommend *Ghost Wars* as an enthralling read and non-fiction writing at its best.