

themselves. The problem of leadership, for example, was never properly resolved by the rondas: most ronda leaders were unable to cope with excessive burdens of responsibility and accountability that the position demanded. Many left their villages after standing down. Nevertheless, Starn concludes, and one is inclined to agree with him, the balance is largely positive. The rondas made a significant difference to peasants' livelihoods at the local level. Moreover, they contributed to a changing perception of the peasantry in Peru's cities and helped put peasant issues back on the political agenda.

Starn's presence, indeed participation, in the story of rondas adds a fascinating anecdotal dimension to the narrative. This is not a stale monograph written at arm's length by a supposedly impartial observer. Starn takes part in the patrols, he sits in the "justice-making" meetings, he helps dig the grave of a young girl who dies of dysentery, he gets an NGO in Lima to fund a water project in the village of Iraca Grande. Starn's hands-on approach extends to whipping himself to gauge the pain of ronda justice. In the village of Tunnel Six where he carried out much of his ethnographic work, Starn becomes a source of loans for the cash-strapped peasants. However, Starn's participation produced conflicts. Starn recalls with shame the day he stood by as a rustler was tortured by the ronderos. He feels uneasy with the secondary role of women in the rondas. These aspects of the book add to rather than obfuscate the story. Starn's presence is never obtrusive; the anthropologist, and at times Robin Kirk, his *compañera*, appear not out of a desire to bask in the narrative limelight, but because their role in the events is part and parcel of the ethnographic record.

*Nightwatch* is an elegantly crafted and important book that deserves a readership that extends far beyond the confines of Latin American anthropology and Peruvian studies. It successfully meshes a gripping narrative with an engaging discussion of key themes, ranging from the nature of fieldwork to peasant resistance and globalisation. More important, it brings to light one of the most important Latin American peasant movements of the twentieth century, until now overshadowed by the dramatic impact of the Shining Path on Peru.

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John K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, (second edition) (London: Pluto Press, 2000).

The very best book on the tragedy of Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, is more than two years old. First published in 1999 and re-issued in an expanded second edition a year later, John K. Cooley's *Unholy Wars* is a remarkably prescient guide to the foreign policy machinations that led to the attacks on the United States by Islamic extremists. Although Cooley is a veteran journalist with many years of

experience at ABC News, he does not suffer from the chronic forgetfulness of his professions. Unlike other reporters, he remembers well a time when the United States found it useful to ally itself with “some of the most conservative and fanatical followers of Islam.” His book is a measured assessment of the terrible price this alliance inflicted on innocent civilians all over the world.

The story begins in the late 1970s when the United States government was worried about its diminishing international power in the wake of the Vietnam War. In response to this perceived failure, the U.S. started to shore up its position in the Middle East by closely allying itself with Islamic religious conservatives. The main partners of this alliance were Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Pakistan. The governments of these nations were seen as reliable bulwarks against communist aggression. The fall of the Shah in Iran and increasing Soviet activity in Afghanistan worried all these nations and drew them together in a very tight network, similar to the anti-communist alliance that also emerged in South America in the 1970s.

As Cooley notes, one of the main instigators of this Islamic anti-communist alliance was Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was then serving as National Security Advisor under President Jimmy Carter. In 1979, Brzezinski became interested in Afghanistan as a possible battleground for deploying the forces of Islamic religious conservatives against the Soviet Union. As Brzezinski admitted in 1997 in an interview in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, the United States allied itself to anti-Soviet forces in Afghanistan, notably the famous holy warriors known as the Mujahadeen, even prior to the Soviet invasion of December 1979. “According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the Mujahadeen began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan, 24 Dec 1979,” Brzezinski told the French newspaper. “But the reality, secretly guarded until now, is completely otherwise: Indeed, it was July 3, 1979 that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. And that very day, I wrote a note to the president in which I explained to him that in my opinion this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention... We didn’t push the Russians to intervene, but we knowingly increased the probability that they would.”

Jimmy Carter’s successor Ronald Reagan greatly expanded the policy begun by Brzezinski. During the 1980s, the United States government, working closely with the governments of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, supplied more than three billion dollars of assistance to the Mujahadeen. During the 1980s, independent journalists such as Alexander Cockburn and Robert Fisk accurately described the Mujahadeen as dangerous religious fanatics, notable for their cruel misogynist treatment of women. These reports were ignored in the mainstream media, which preferred to lionize the Mujahadeen as brave “freedom fighters.”

Cooley astutely notes that the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s was truly an international struggle. The call for a holy war against communism attracted

young men from all over the Islamic world, notably the Saudi millionaire Usama bin Laden. Having ample funds of his own, bin Laden was not directly financed by the United States. However, bin Laden was nurtured and supported by the web of alliances the United States created.

This web of alliances, held together by anti-communism, was global in scope. Hence Saudi money helped arm the Contras fighting in Nicaragua. Rogue financial institutions such as the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) provided cover for the numerous money laundering operations required by this alliance. The Iran-Contra scandal was a by-product of this alliance system.

As a key player in Afghanistan in the 1980s, bin Laden learned to how to organize an illicit international organization, how to transfer and launder money, and how to think in global terms. In a very real way, bin Laden's Al-Qaeda organization, which is being blamed for many terrorists attacks in addition to the Sept. 11 atrocities, was born in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

The rest of the story is well known. The Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. In the wake of their departure, the country fell into civil war and chaos, eventually leading to the triumph of the Taliban. Seizing power in Afghanistan in 1996, the Taliban enforced a regime notable for its extreme religious fanaticism and suppression of women. The Taliban would also, of course, provide sanctuary to bin Laden, setting the stage for more tragedy both in Afghanistan and the United States.

In general, the architects of U.S. foreign policy remain proud of what they have wrought. In 1997 Brzezinski said there was no grounds for regrets. "What is most important to the history of the world?" Brzezinski asked "The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?" These were meant to be rhetorical questions but not everyone will find the answers so self-evident. The skeptically inclined might wonder if it was not possible that the decrepit Soviet Union of the 1970s and 1980s could have been challenged without stirring up a brutal religious war.

In any case, Cooley's book usefully reminds us that religious extremism is not an inherent product of Islamic society. Indeed, historically, religious fanaticism has often been nurtured by state agencies with their own agenda. Of course, there are also social forces behind the worldwide rise of religious extremism. Cooley's book, focusing as it does on politics and foreign policy, glides over these sociological forces. Hence his book needs to be supplemented by other books on the Middle East that provide a thicker description of every-day life. Despite this flaw, his book is clearly written and extremely valuable guide to the diplomatic history of the Middle East over the last thirty years. Anyone seeking to get their bearings on the events of Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> should turn to Cooley for guidance.

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