

**Book Review  
By  
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**Akbar Ahmed, *The Thistle and the Drone: How America's War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam* (Brookings Institution Press Washington D.C, 2013), pp 424.**

The new book by the renowned author, film maker, Islamic scholar and professor of anthropology is a detailed study of war against terror perpetrated on tribes of Pakistan and those living in different parts of world populated by Muslims. Beside his personal knowledge and experiences as a government officer posted in tribal areas of Pakistan in Waziristan previously the author has benefitted from forty case studies on tribes living in various parts of South Asia, West Asia, Far East, Africa and Russia (Dagestan). Akbar Ahmed's extensive knowledge about the Islamic societies and anthropological studies makes him eminently qualified to write on the subject of the book.

The author has developed the main arguments of the book around two major themes. One, that the states supported by the United States, which is a power centre, are fighting wars in various parts of the world against tribes who have remained on the peripheries of the state system. The conflict between the state (centre) and the tribes (peripheries) that has erupted is due to the fact that the two have diametrically opposite world views. The state is a modern construct and tries to exercise its legal authority to establish its writ in all areas within its borders. Tribes on the other hand live by their traditional values of honour and freedom. They resist any attempt to change their traditional values and are prepared to die for them. This theme has been beautifully captured in the book *The Thistle and the Drone: How America's War on Terror Became a Global War on Tribal Islam*. The drone in the title symbolizes destructive power of US technology and the thistle is a metaphor for tribes' resilience and resistance to US power.

The other theme of the book is the inability of the US and other world powers to understand and address causes of unrest in the tribes. In this regard, the author describes two meetings he attended in the White House to which the author and other scholars were invited for consultation on these issues. One meeting was during President Obama's first administration and other during President Bush's

time. In both these meetings hardly any government official paid attention to what the scholars said in few minutes allotted to each. The policies, therefore, developed by Bush and Obama administrations were reflective of superficial understandings of the problems that these policies intended to solve.

Akabr Ahmed reaches the conclusion that use of force, particularly drone strikes, have not only failed in achieving its intended objective of making the marginalized tribes submit to the state's authority, it is even having the opposite effect. The tribes are now seeking autonomy from the state system in retaliation to the use of force against them. The interests of US and the tribes converge in some countries as both are seeking to change incumbent governments or as the author puts it US "found these tribes as receptive hosts."

The book is an excellent study of tribal codes of honour, love for freedom, hospitality and clash of their traditional values with the amoral structure of modern state system. The author has relied heavily on his personal experience during his interactions with the tribes, his previous studies on this subject, and anecdotal evidence to support his views. It is a book about tribal cultural values and the stress they are facing owing to the war on terror and it has great value for the readers who are interested in this subject.

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