

**Book Review**  
**By**  
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**Mark Mazzetti, *The Way of the Knife: the untold story of USA's secret war***

**(India: Penguin Books, 2013), pp 77.**

Mark Mazzetti is a well-known journalist, currently working for the New York Times as the national security correspondent and a Pulitzer Prize winner. He has also won a number of other awards. He has previously written for the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Economist*. His book '*The Way of the knife*' revolves around a central theme which is accurately depicted by its subtitle 'the untold story of USA's secret war'. It is a detailed account of the hidden war that has been waged in parallel with the military's war on terror, but is still unknown to many. This war is being fought in lands beyond the territories believed to be the major battleground, mainly Afghanistan and Iraq. The author has revealed that this war has relied more on the 'military-intelligence complex' instead of depending solely on the military-industrial complex. The former was created during the war. The important factor witnessed during its creation is the inter-change of their traditional roles by the CIA and pentagon.

CIA gave up its role of traditional espionage that focused on looking for the secrets of foreign governments and became involved with hunting and killing; usually the task of the military. The legal, legislative and administrative process through which the Bush Administration had authorized such actions for CIA has been discussed in detail. The sweeping mandate which the Congress had give to Bush for waging war against terror and the 'license to kill' granted by President bush to the CIA has enabled its activities to go much beyond the limits laid down for war-fighting. Just as CIA transformed itself from a spy agency into a killing machine using expedient ways to eliminate its targets, a similar shift was witnessed in the structure and function of the Pentagon. Military increasingly came to be engaged in spying and intelligence missions.

The most important factors that have prompted these changes in CIA and Pentagon, as explained by the author have the inter-organizational competition and jealousies with a strong desire to dominate the other. Every major decision regarding the hidden war had to go through a fierce struggle for supremacy between the CIA and Pentagon. According to Mazzetti, no rules governed the war. Years after the war began, there was no coherent plan for it, instead only turf battles were fought for gaining its control. The author has pointed out, by referring to real events, how gross miscommunications and obliterated intelligence have most often led to major security lapses.

The creation and central role of counter-terrorism center (CTC) as the control room for war and Rumsfeld's strengthening of the joint special operation command to make it the CTC's counterpart show the degree to which Pentagon hated to rely on the advice of CIA. The two organizational structures soon learned to tolerate each other's existence but the conflicting tendencies remained unchanged. Mazzetti describes Iraqi invasion as CIA's nemesis. The faulty intelligence that led to the invasion adversely affected the agency's credibility in addition to its disastrous effects on the situation in Afghanistan. Another motive for going into Iraq revealed by the author was for intelligence gathering; to expand the spy network through the border into Iran that could be tapped in case US decides to invade that country.

For global war, Pentagon expanded spying missions in a number of countries bypassing CIA station chiefs in those countries. What enabled the waging of war outside declared war zones were the Drones, a subject about which Mazzetti speaks at length. In these 'angry birds' or the predator drones, the US found its ultimate weapons for secret war, having the ability to hit and kill precisely anywhere and seemingly without risk. He has also discussed in detail the history of sanctioning their use that allowed the US to wage wars with the help of remote control, their upgradation from hunters into killers, increased confidence in drones due to initial successes and most importantly how America's drone campaign had redrawn the map of Islamic militancy. The drones were used world-wide and only after they were sanctioned by the respective governments by striking deals that poured in money in exchange for targeted killing enabled by these predators.

By and large it was a 'a war by proxy'. By narrating the case of Ethiopian proxy that was emerged in Somalia to curtail the radical faction al-Shabab, the author has described a pattern of how such proxies further worsened the conditions resulting in more bloodshed and insurgencies. The reasons for, the US to hire services of Blackwater and other contractors of the kind have been elaborated. It was also a 'war without frontiers', i.e. a war fraught on infinite number of fronts. The traditional war also had a psychological dimension played by relying on black propaganda and psychological operation like that of the cold war period. This time overseen by Pentagon and not by CIA, all media of communication particularly the cell phones were exploited to impact the minds of youth across the Muslim world. The CIA ex-officers and MNC's had their own role in the war. Mazzetti talks of US failure to predict and check the Arab Spring despite the proxies and expanded clandestine mission in Africa.

Mazzetti has looked deeply into the dynamics of US-Pakistan and particularly CIA-ISI relationship that developed, evolved, improved and deteriorated along the course of the war. It was a 'marriage among spies' that proved quite expensive for Pakistan as a nation-state. He has described the fragility of peace deals struck between the establishment and militant groups and the double crossings of the spy game going on

in Islamabad. The mistrust began to grow wider with Pakistan's reluctance to hit the Haqqani network and other militant groups operating in North Waziristan. These groups were retained by Islamabad as essential proxies to protect against India. Lack of action by Pakistan promoted US to take actions without its approval and for that purpose the number of CIA undercover officers in Pakistan had to be increased which poured in during the relief campaign following the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005.

Raymond Davis and the operation that killed Osama Bin Laden in 2011 brought into sharper focus the nature of US-Pakistan relationship. Details about how spies were implanted, how a secret army was built and how these intensified anti-American sentiments in Pakistan have been discussed in an interesting manner. The 'knife' killed quickly, but the belief that it had reduced costs was a mere misunderstanding, as Mazzetti puts it, 'the knife has created as many enemies as it has killed'.

The book takes into account the period since the emergence of Taliban and Al-Qaeda relating them to the Soviet war in Afghanistan. It makes the readers think over the legal and moral aspects of vast array of actions and activities which have become a norm under the global war on terror. It also opens up the organizational dimension of the war on terror in clear terms showing how inter-institutional divergences can act against the efforts of the troops fighting on the ground. The important lesson is that those with might are never bound by the limits of the deals made publicly; there is much more they actually do under the cover of otherwise appeasing and non-lethal deals. The book appears to be a non-biased account of the realities that have governed this war but had remained concealed from the world. Author's interpretations and insights on US policies and actions of successive governments point towards his ability to overrule emotional biases, and his sincerity to his profession. In a dispassionate manner he has penned down his enquiry into the way of the 'knife' and the consequences that this use of 'knife' have led to.

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