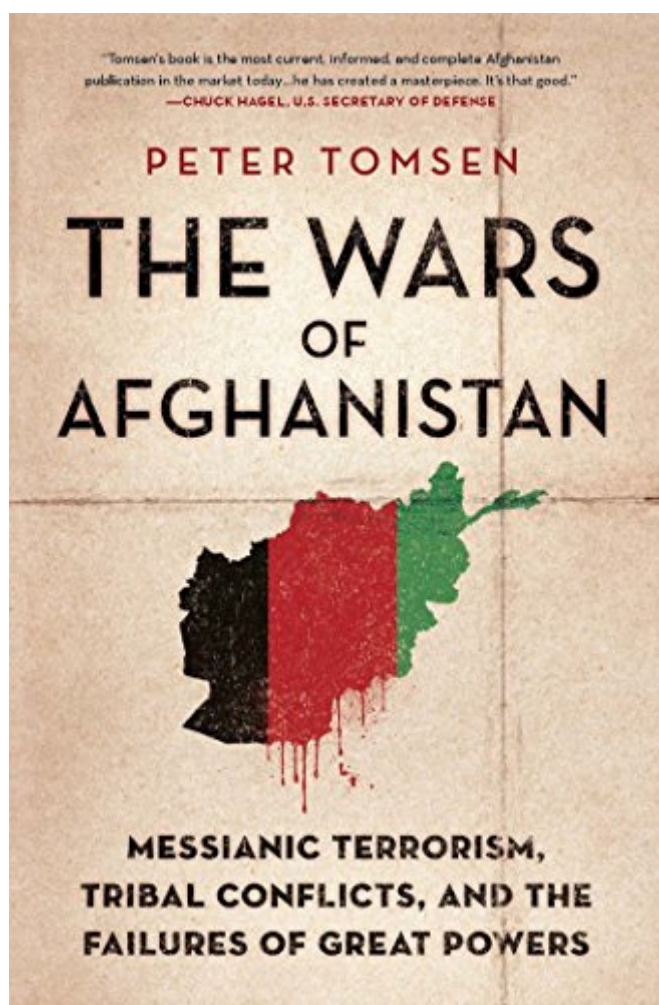


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The Wars Of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, And The Failures Of Great Powers



Synopsis

As Ambassador and Special Envoy on Afghanistan from 1989 to 1992, Peter Tomsen has had close relationships with Afghan leaders and has dealt with senior Taliban, warlords, and religious leaders involved in the region's conflicts over the last two decades. Now Tomsen draws on a rich trove of never-before-published material to shed new light on the American involvement in the long and continuing Afghan war. This book offers a deeply informed perspective on how Afghanistan's history as a "shatter zone" for foreign invaders and its tribal society have shaped the modern Afghan narrative. It brings to life the appallingly misinformed secret operations by foreign intelligence agencies, including the Soviet NKVD and KGB, the Pakistani ISI, and the CIA. American policy makers, Tomsen argues, still do not understand Afghanistan; nor do they appreciate how the CIA's covert operations and the Pentagon's military strategy have strengthened extremism in the country. At this critical time, he shows how the U.S. and the coalition it leads can assist the region back to peace and stability.

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Customer Reviews

I am grateful for this book. As its author, Peter Tomsen, points out there is pervasive ignorance about Afghanistan's history, culture and tribal society. It is a complex mosaic that has never truly experienced a central government due to tribal, ethnic and religious differences. Many have compared the U.S. and Coalition forces efforts in the country to previous disasters experienced by the British and the Soviets. Tomsen writes, "The 1838 British invasion of Afghanistan established a pattern repeated during future invasions of Afghanistan: hubristic justifications, initial success, gradually widening Afghan resistance, stalemate, and withdrawal." Fast-forward 150 years and at their peak the Soviets controlled only 20% of the country and 15% of the population. The Politburo's discussions in the 1980's regarding withdrawal sounded eerily similar to what U.S. leaders would debate. Both faced high casualties, big expenditures, antiwar sentiment at home, and little progress on any front. Afghan history is incredibly bloody and the complex society largely unstable with violence an accepted option. This is even more the case when outsiders enter their borders. Afghans also have a tradition of changing sides - they favor the probable winner so loyalties beyond families and clans are far from assured. This history was incredibly helpful, however, it was when the author (and former Special Envoy on Afghanistan from 1989 to 1992) covered the last twenty years of Afghan history. It confirmed my own conclusion about Pakistani culpability in promoting radical Islam and orchestrating extremist proxy warfare. As Tomsen says, "The epicenter of world terrorism is in Pakistan, not Afghanistan." He describes Pakistan as an army with a state rather than other way around. So why has the Pakistani military and their intelligence agency, the ISI, meddled so deeply in Afghan affairs? Tomsen explains that they aim for an Afghanistan ruled by pro-Pakistani Afghan religious extremists to help create "strategic depth" against India, stave off the "Pashtunistan" cause - the unification of Pashtuns on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani frontier, while maintaining control in Pakistan's domestic policy. Incredibly, the U.S. still supplies Pakistan with staggering amounts of cash and Tomsen claims that America "outsources" its Afghan policy to Pakistan. This when the evidence continues to stack up against Pakistan in their complicity in the actions of the Taliban, al Qaeda, and other extremist groups. Tora Bora and Osama bin Laden's last hideout are clear indictments. The irony is Tomsen documents Taliban complaints of Pakistani duplicity. This nine hundred and seventy two page book moves with speed. The complex and dense content is well laid out. Tomsen is highly credible and maintains objectivity though he is firm in his conclusions and convictions. He offers a prescription at the end of the book which speaks to an optimism that may surprise given the mess that is Afghanistan.

I found the first half of this book very well-written and interesting, but unfortunately the second half

did not carry the momentum. The second-half became too personal, occasionally out of chronological order, and it often repeated itself. While the information in the second-half of the book is interesting, presentation struggled. My recommendation is that this is a good book if you are interested in British and Russian occupation of Afghanistan, as well as a general summary of the history beforehand. However, unless you desire to focus on 1989 to 1992 only, I would not recommend this book for understanding America's involvement there if you are looking for a coherent, easy-to-understand read.

The story of the United States' policy in Afghanistan, from the war against the Soviets to the vacuum of the 1990s to today's frustrating and costly yet needed commitment is presented with great clarity and insight by a veteran diplomat who was at the center of many of the events he writes about. Even where Ambassador Tomsen was not directly involved, he knew enough that, looking in from the periphery on events, he brings unique insights beyond those of the journalists and Washington players whose writings represent the first draft of history. This is Afghanistan 2.0. I am an American that has been working on Afghanistan since soon after the Soviet invasion in 1979. I have written four books on the subject (the most recent of which, AFGHANISTAN: GRAVEYARD OF EMPIRES, has just been published in a revised paperback edition). So I know the subject and I know Ambassador Tomsen and his work over the years. From my experience, this book is accurate and objective. The author has by no means averted his eyes from the many, many policy failures, including those by the State Department, that have taken place over the years. Nor does he hesitate to name the Great and Good in Washington who, with reputations untarnished, managed to inflict lasting harm on Afghanistan and the Afghans. Anyone interested in Afghanistan beyond the headlines and today's too-often-sterile policy debates needs to read this book.

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