Spring 2012, a quiet summer afternoon in the village of Doga, near Dattakhel, North Waziristan. The silence is broken by the sounds of army vehicles sweeping in from the main road. In minutes, a cordon is laid to the village. The target is the house of a Waziri from the Maddakhel tribe known for his involvement in the fight against US forces in neighboring Afghanistan. No one knows why the army has decided to pick a fight with him.

Local villagers decide the army has overstepped its limits. Before the soldiers proceed to violate the privacy of their homes, they pick up their weapons, spot the weakest link in the cordon and empty their cartridges on the line of olive green vehicles dotting the perimeters of the village. In the ensuing firefight, the Waziris escape unscathed after giving the soldiers of 9 Div a bloody nose. The officer in charge of the cordon decides to withdraw in the face of mounting casualties. As they make their retreat, the soldiers spot an elderly man stepping out of the local mosque, leaning on his stick. The man, visibly in his eighties, is hard of hearing. As he casually strolls back towards his home, indifferent to the rattle of gunfire and RPGs that just preceded his departure from the mosque, the retreating soldiers pick him up and shove him in the back of their vehicle. On their hasty withdrawal towards Dattakhel Camp, the convoy spots two young boys walking past the main road. Two more soft targets for the company whose martial pride has been rubbed in the dust by the death toll of eight dead and four injured. The two boys, one thirteen and the other fourteen years old, are picked up and shoved in the back of the vehicle. In a few minutes time, soldiers of 9 Div return to their base with a bloodied ego and the human booty of three innocents, none of whom is of fighting age. In the interrogation that follows, the old man confesses to the ‘crime’ of being the father of the young man who was the target of the army’s search operation. The poor soul- unaware of the laws that govern the retributory behavior of this ‘foreign force’- has signed in his innocence his own death warrant.

Next morning, along the road from Dattakhel to Doga, locals discover the bodies of three men dumped along the roadside. One is a bearded old man in his late eighties, eyes gouged out; his body stabbed all over with daggers. The other two quartered bodies are of young boys in their early teens. Their mutilated bodies too tell a horrifying tale of the most perverse forms of torture: gouged out eyes, stab wounds all over the body, acid burns. The outrage is too shocking even for the otherwise tough-natured Waziris.

One is left to wonder what leads the army to commit such atrocities with impunity? Disdainful arrogance and the ‘bloody civilian complex’\(^1\) inculcated at PMA aside, the torture is so plain.

\(^1\) Mental disorder peculiar to officers of the Pakistan army; variant of superiority complex found in some ordinary humans. Symptoms include hyper-inflated ego, acute feeling of superiority, extreme contempt for everything human/civilian. So far no treatment has been discovered by psychiatrists. However, a posting of brief duration in
outrageous that even its mention sends shivers down the spine. The last I read of such punishments was in history books in the context of the inquisition in Spain. Have the Inquisitors returned from their graves to don the uniforms of the supposedly most prestigious institution that this system has to offer? Or is this a sordid interpretation of the clause of collective punishment in the FCR? If so, the Israelis should visit the PMA and receive a lesson or two in the art of collective punishment to deal more effectively with the Palestinians.

The atrocities of the army, from Bangladesh to the Red Mosque, leave one perplexed. How can apparently civilized and well-groomed officers and soldiers stoop to such low levels? But what is most perplexing is that the sheer barbarity that characterizes these atrocities becomes more and more intense as you reach the tribal heartland. Clips of soldiers in Swat brutally beating old men in their 40s, 50s and 60s, officers dragging a bearded old man with a blood-stained face from a rope tied to his neck, and summary executions of teenagers in Malakand that surfaced on the internet in recent years caused some shock and outrage in Pakistan. But what has escaped the myopic eye of the media is far more shocking.

30 truck drivers were lined up in the Mir Ali Bazaar and summarily executed by the army to avenge the death of its soldiers at the Eesha checkpoint in December last year. In Malakand, people accused of sympathizing with the Taliban have been dropped alive from helicopters flying several hundred feet in the sky. During the Mehsud operation in 2009, several hundred villages were burnt down by the army as part of its policy of collective punishment. The bazaars of Mehsud from Makan to Sararogha were wiped out by the aerial bombardment of the air force in 2009. Even before the start of operation Rah-e-Azaab, the Mir Ali Bazaar, the second largest commercial hub in North Waziristan, was razed to the ground by artillery shelling. During the present operation, the Deegon bazaar was completely razed to the ground by the Army after fighting had ended in Deegon and the Mujahideen had withdrawn from the area. What is most disturbing, however, is that in the Islamic Republic mosques and madrassahs have remained the target of choice for the military. Hundreds of mosques and madrassahs have been deliberately targeted by the air force during military operations in Swat, Malakand, Mehsud, Bajaur, Mohmand, Orakzai, and Khyber. The same sacrilege is now being repeated in North Waziristan.

Burnt villages, destroyed mosques and razed bazaars dotting the landscape of the entire tribal belt all pose the same question: Why has this been the share of a people who have done no harm to Pakistan in 65 years of its existence?

Perhaps the answer lies in the mindset inherited generation after generation from the times of the British, the psyche of treating the tribal areas as ‘Ilaga- e-ghair’; the land of the other. This image of the tribes as the “Other” that is deeply ingrained in our psyche owes itself to a more imperial past. Its roots go back to the days of the British Raj, when soldiers of the so-called “martial races” were recruited in the Royal Indian Army from the plains of Punjab to subdue the free territories of the frontier, which had defied, for a hundred years, every British attempt at subjugation and incorporation in the British administered settled districts. Punjabi soldiers of the Royal Indian Army served in the Frontier Force and Punjab Regiments. From Bajaur in the North to

Mehsud, Orakzai, Khyber or other conflict zones in the tribal areas is known to have relieved some of the more chronic symptoms.
Waziristan in the south, they fought shoulder to shoulder with their British masters against the forces of Mullah Powindah, the Faqir of Ipi, and the warriors of the Mujahideen movement. Most of the battle colours, medals and honours of the units of the Punjab and FF Regiment were earned in these battles fought in the name of the Queen.² Despite hundreds of punitive campaigns and hard-fought battles in the valleys and mountains of the tribal areas, the British government and the Royal Indian Army failed to break the resolve of the tribes to remain free and independent. Hence they became the “Other”:

They remain the ‘other’ in our collective psyche because our forefathers submitted- some by force and others by choice- to the will of the British Empire, while they did not. Our ancestors, willingly or unwillingly, accepted life under the shade of the British Raj; whereas they resisted every attempt to bring them under British dominion until the last British soldier left the subcontinent. While a certain wretched class from the Punjab brought lasting shame to its people by fighting in defense of the Union Jack in the very land they called home, the tribes fought in defense of Islam and for the sake of Allah alone. Let us not forget that the self-professed ‘Muslim’ soldiers of the Royal Indian Army participated in the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the British conquest of Palestine in World War I, earned medals on the frontlines from Hong Kong to Normandy in World War II, and in the process ‘sacrificed’ their lives for the sake of the Queen.

The tribes are the ‘other’ because pre-independence units of the Pakistan Army fought against their ancestors with the lofty aim of expanding the frontiers of British India and enforcing the ‘writ of the state’, only to suffer defeat after defeat at the hands of a people who have never known a master. While their military heroes are the likes of Mullah Powindah and the Faqir of Ipi, among the decorated military heroes of “our” army is General Musa Khan, who played a leading role in the British campaigns in Waziristan, and whose name to this date decorates the hills surrounding Boya check post near Miranshah, North Waziristan.

They are the ‘other’ because, unlike much of Pakistan, they refused to sell their souls and say “America First” after 9/11, and for more than thirteen years they have steadfastly remained a pain in the neck for America, NATO and their local mine-cleaning dogs.³ It is they who refuse to allow NATO containers to pass unscathed from their land, while the best some of us can do is pay lip-service in protest. They are the ‘other’ because they have hosted the Mujahideen for over a decade, despite all the drone attacks, the military operations and threats from America and NATO, while Pakistan has turned its land and airspace into a free-zone for the crusaders.

But is this the truth that we subconsciously accept? I doubt. What one hears in discussions with friends in Pakistan is a different narrative. Subtle references to the tribes as dens of crime, safe haven for dacoits, murderers, thugs, thieves, car-lifters, and so on…But wait a second. Has anyone ever bothered to compare the statistics of crime… theft, murders, kidnap for ransom and car-lifting… in the settled districts with the rate of crime in the tribal areas? The dens of car-lifting, theft, murder and kidnap for ransom are in our mega-cities: Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, and Rawalpindi. Contrary to the popular notion, most of the cars lifted from Pakistan do not end up in the tribal areas; rather they are disassembled inside the settled areas, particularly in the

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² Queen of England
³ Pakistan Army, ISI, MI, Air Force etc.
areas around Swabi, Nowshera and Kohat, and their spare parts sold in the spare part markets of the big cities.

From my personal experience, and the experience of hundreds of others like me, I can most emphatically claim that the tribal areas in general and Waziristan in particular have the lowest crime rates in Pakistan. Why? Because you don’t have the Punjab Police here. There is no crime because there is no police station in the tribal belt. You bring in a police station in a peaceful place, and you’ll soon see crime institutionalized. The police thrives where crime thrives. Crime keeps the money flowing to their pockets from all directions. A society with zero crime rates doesn’t need police. In other words, police doesn’t need a society with zero crime rates. It’s a question of their survival.

Another reason why you don’t have crime here is that it’s an armed society. In fact, before it is armed, it is a “society”. It is a world apart from our cities where all social ties have been bisected by the false gods of money and materialism. Our cities are places occupied by zombies who construct their own artificial reality around them to protect themselves from the real world. It’s an artificial world where you can’t tell a man from a walking ATM. And to make matters worse, arms are the monopoly of two types of criminals: one in uniform that goes around in those Blue Civics (if he is a bigger criminal, then an olive green Hilux) and the other your petty thieves and robbers, who most of the time don’t even have bullets in their magazines and will load their guns twice, if not thrice, to scare their innocent (read ignorant) victims!

The people of the tribes, from Bajaur to Wana are among the most admirable people around not just in this country, but the entire world. Honest, straightforward and courageous, they are the most hospitable people I have come across in my life. Unlike our urban culture lacking in courtesy where we almost indirectly ask the guest: did you eat before coming or will you go and eat, they compete with each other and fight over guests. An honourable and proud people, they take Islam seriously and don’t hesitate to sacrifice their lives for its sake. There is something intrinsically good about tribal society that everywhere it is the tribes and tribal society that have defended Islam against a global onslaught and have sheltered the Mujahideen. This is a phenomenon that we see repeating itself from Mali, Somalia, Yemen to Afghanistan and the tribal belt of Pakistan. No wonder, the biggest proponent of the Mc culture, America- the very symbol of that artificial life that we see growing like cancer in our cities- sees the threat coming not from Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore, Riyadh or Cairo, but Waziristan, Abyan, Mali, and the tribal hinterlands of Somalia. It is the tribal areas in these Muslim countries that are the prime target of the neo-Crusaders’ military and cultural onslaught. Even as our societies are plagued by apathy and confusion in this war, our enemy has not failed to recognize the “Other” that threatens it. Our enemy has not failed to make out friend from foe. It knows exactly where the threat to its imperial designs comes from within Muslim societies, and it has chosen as its reliable ally the class of “house negroes” that has without fail served imperial interests generation after generation.

Therefore, until we recognize the real “Other” that sits in our midst; that thrives on our taxes to build its Defense Housing Societies; that knows no enemy except its own people4; that has the shameless audacity to prey on the very hands that have patiently sustained it for sixty years; and

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4 A time-tested fact only recently acknowledged by the army in its latest official war doctrine.
until we tear the veil of deceit and hypocrisy that masks the face of this enemy within us, we will continue to see our own people massacred and their towns and villages reduced to ruins.

It is time we too muster the courage to make out friend from foe.

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