



The Tender Soldier: A True Story of War and Sacrifice

By Vanessa M. Gezari

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A “sharp-eyed look at the complexities of war” (*Parade*), that explores the inner workings of the Human Terrain System, a Pentagon program that sends civilian social scientists into war zones to help soldiers understand local culture.

On the day Barack Obama was elected president in November 2008, a small group of American civilians took their optimism and experience to a village west of Kandahar, Afghanistan. They were part of the Pentagon’s controversial attempt to bring social science to the battlefield, driven by the notion that you can’t win a war if you don’t understand the enemy and his culture. The field team in Afghanistan that day included an intrepid Texas blonde, a former bodyguard for Afghan president Hamid Karzai, and an ex-military intelligence sergeant who had come to Afghanistan to make peace with his troubled past. But not all goes as planned.

In this tale of moral suspense, journalist Vanessa Gezari follows these three idealists from the hope that brought them to Afghanistan through the events of the fateful day when one is gravely wounded, an Afghan is dead, and a proponent of cross-cultural engagement is charged with his murder. Through it all, these brave Americans ended up showing the world just how determined they were to get things right, how hard it was to really understand a place like Afghanistan where storytelling has been a major tool of survival, and why all future wars will involve this strange mix of fighting and listening.

Vanessa Gezari is the only journalist to have gained access to the lives of people inside this troubled Army program, including the brilliant, ambitious figures who conceived it. This true story of war and sacrifice will upend your ideas about what really went wrong in Afghanistan.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Doug Stanton on *The Tender Soldier* By Vanessa M. Gezari



Doug Stanton is a teacher, lecturer, and author of the New York Times bestsellers *In Harm's Way* and *Horse Soldiers*. His writing has appeared in *Esquire*, *The New York Times*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *TIME*, the *Washington Post*, *Men's Journal*, *Outside*, *The Daily Beast/Newsweek*. Stanton has appeared multiple times on the *Today Show*, *CNN*, *Imus In The Morning*, *Discovery*, *A&E*, *Fox News*, *NPR*, *MSNBC's Morning Joe*, and *NBC Nightly News*. *Horse Soldiers* is in development as a movie by Jerry Bruckheimer Films. Stanton reads and lectures nationally to business, civic groups, libraries, writing & book clubs, and universities, including the United States Air Force Academy, University of Michigan, and The Union League Club. Stanton attended Interlochen Arts Academy, Hampshire College, and received an MFA from the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, where he graduated with coursework in both fiction and poetry workshops. He founded the National Writers Series, a book festival; and the Front Street Writers Studio, a free writing workshop for public high school students.

Anyone wishing to understand more deeply, and with more complexity, the U.S.'s relationship to Afghanistan will find in *The Tender Soldier* more than they could have imagined, and certainly more than they have learned from any number of news reports, books, pundits, and the like. Part history, part war story, part critique, Gezari writes with a stone-cutter's brilliance, snapping into focus a part of the world, and a chapter in American history, that we don't fully comprehend. This is to say that she has written an entirely thrilling and engrossing book. Citizens on the daily commute, social workers, diplomats, students, and, well, anyone really interested in what it feels like to have been that neighbor down the street who deployed, and what it feels like to have been the Afghan citizen onto whose block your neighbor deployed, will read *The Tender Soldier* in a few nights and come away feeling smarter and enriched.

In many ways, Gezari's book raises the very essential question, 'How is knowledge powerful? To what uses should—and can—it be put? Can knowledge be weaponized?' Anyone who has read David Kilcullen's *The Accidental Guerrilla* will read *The Tender Soldier* with the same sense of anticipation—that here are vexing, yet fascinating, questions: 'How do you resolve conflict?' In many ways, Gezari's book is a work of anthropology itself: she enters into the world of Human Terrain Systems and draws to vivid and rich life the people who have practiced their craft in this world; and at the same time Gezari manages to be critical,

empathic, and conclusive. The final sentence of the eighth chapter—‘What we wanted was to understand ourselves’—deeply sums up the hall of mirrors that can be the world of ‘rapport building,’ the hall of mirrors in which we meet ourselves—and in anthropological terms, the Other, and in military terms, the enemy or ally.

This is brilliant reading for anyone who wants to understand our past decade and more, and it can be read as a kind of road map by which to understand other wars, and other news reports breaking daily around us.

Review

“As Neil Sheehan’s *Bright Shining Lie* did with Vietnam, Ms. Gezari’s deft if less sweeping narrative dissects the hopes, hubris and shortcomings of America’s efforts to nation-build in Afghanistan while fighting a war there.... It is a testament to the book’s strengths that it left me wanting more.... Ms. Gezari’s book powerfully humanizes the ways the counterinsurgency effort played out in Afghanistan.” (*The New York Times*)

“With a journalist’s discerning eye for nuance, Gezari brings readers into [a] controversial gray area, framed within the larger, just as murky, context that has come to define the distant wars in Iraq and Afghanistan....Gezari’s writing stands apart from other depictions of our post-9/11 wars....Her book exemplifies the persistence of a war-wise reporter who filed from frontline locations, seeking out sources in sketchy areas, often unescorted by U.S. military personnel....The book’s main subject and its author both devoted themselves—like real anthropologists—to listening, recording, and understanding the stories of the ‘other.’ Iraqis and Afghans have more in common with us than we might think.” (*The Daily Beast*)

“A sharp-eyed look at the complexities of war.” (*Parade*)

"Bravely reported and beautifully told, *The Tender Soldier* is a crushing story of good intentions and war. Vanessa Gezari is an unflinching journalist, and she has written a great, angering, and heartbreaking book that in its many layers is as damning as it is honorable." (David Finkel, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of the New York Times bestseller *The Good Soldiers*)

“Part history, part war story, part critique, Gezari writes with a stonecutter’s brilliance, snapping into focus a part of the world, and a chapter in American history, that we don’t fully comprehend. Citizens will read *The Tender Soldier* in a few nights and come away feeling smarter and enriched. This is brilliant reading and is a kind of road map by which to understand other wars, and other news reports breaking daily around us.” (Doug Stanton, author of the New York Times bestseller *Horse Soldiers*)

“The story running through the heart of *The Tender Soldier* is a searing reminder that wars may be waged with good intentions, but they are built upon tragedy. Vanessa Gezari explores this grim paradox with an admirable lucidity and a sharp eye for the kind of telling detail that make her account of the U.S. war in Afghanistan a moving, unforgettable read.” (Jon Lee Anderson, New Yorker staff writer and author of the national bestseller *The Fall of Baghdad*)

"*The Tender Soldier* takes readers on an eloquent journey back through one tragic American death in Afghanistan. But its larger point is a hard-fisted critique of the U.S. military's chronic inability to understand the larger world in which it operates. It is a book worth memorizing, and repeating to U.S. decision-makers, when the next Iraq or Afghanistan presents itself—as it surely will." (Dana Priest, Pulitzer Prize-winning coauthor of *Top Secret America*)

"Gezari's gripping tale of American idealism gone wrong is vital reading for anyone interested in America's

decade of war in Afghanistan. Beautifully told, the book illuminates one of the most interesting and little known programs in recent U.S. military history." (Lourdes Garcia-Navarro, NPR international correspondent)

"Readers get a sobering feel for the difficult task of waging a war on foreign soil, as well as the travails of hardworking and often brilliant individuals struggling to change enormous political and social systems for the better. Nuanced, readable, and utterly engrossing, Gezari's exposé is a revelatory and unique look at the war in Afghanistan." (Publishers Weekly (starred review))

"Insightful....Gezari delivers a gripping report on another of America's painful, surprisingly difficult efforts to win hearts and minds." (Kirkus Reviews (starred review))

About the Author

Vanessa M. Gezari holds the James Madison Visiting Professorship at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. She has written for *The Washington Post*, *The New Republic*, *Slate*, and others. She lives in New York.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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The knowledge that you get from *The Tender Soldier: A True Story of War and Sacrifice* may be the more deep you rooting the information that hide within the words the more you get thinking about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to comprehend but *The Tender Soldier: A True Story of War and Sacrifice* giving you thrill feeling of reading. The copy writer conveys their point in specific way that can be understood by anyone who read the item because the author of this guide is well-known enough. This book also makes your vocabulary increase well. It is therefore easy to understand then can go along with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We suggest you for having this specific *The Tender Soldier: A True Story of War and Sacrifice* instantly.

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The Tender Soldier: A True Story of War and Sacrifice can be one of your basic books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this e-book has good vocabulary that could increase your knowledge in vocab, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The article author giving his/her effort to put every word into delight arrangement in writing The Tender Soldier: A True Story of War and Sacrifice although doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource information that maybe you can be considered one of it. This great information can certainly drawn you into new stage of crucial imagining.

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