

## The Tender Soldier: A True Story of War and Sacrifice

By Vanessa M. Gezari  
Simon & Schuster, 2013  
347 pp. \$25  
ISBN: 978-1-4391-7739-6

Reviewed by  
Michael C. Davies

On November 4, 2008, Paula Loyd, a social scientist with a relatively new U.S. Army program, the Human Terrain System (HTS) and its deployed Human Terrain Teams, was on task in Maiwand, Afghanistan. Deployed to study the sociocultural nuances of the Afghan people and help commanders better understand the host population, this day would lead to Loyd's death. *The Tender Soldier: A True Story of War and Sacrifice*, by journalist and Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism Professor Vanessa M. Gezari, is a well-researched and deeply personal narrative of the events of that day and the controversies surrounding the program that deployed Loyd into the field.

HTS has been a controversial topic from its earliest days. The notion of deploying civilian Ph.D.s and M.A.s

into Iraq and Afghanistan to engage in combat ethnography in direct support of U.S. military units was anathema to many in academia, the military, and the media. These are the topics, controversies, and debates that Gezari traces as the story of Loyd develops.

Gezari describes in great and often uncomfortable detail that fateful November day. Loyd was interviewing an Afghan man, Abdul Salam. After many minutes of questions, Salam poured a can of cooking oil on Loyd and set her on fire. Salam was quickly executed by one of Loyd's teammates, Don Ayala. Loyd would die from complications in a hospital 2 months later. Even though the program had lost two other members that same year, Michael Bhatia and Nicole Suveges, this would be its darkest day. For the reader, it can be a genuine struggle to read Gezari's account as she intimately describes what happened through the eyes of Loyd's teammate, Clint Cooper, who held Loyd's hand in the aftermath, and many others present at the time. The horrifying sights, sounds, and smells are imbued on the page. It is a testament to Gezari's writing to be able to achieve such realism.

The narrative style of *The Tender Soldier* weaves through the past and then present by combining an individual's biography with the larger issue of the program. The story of HTS's iconoclastic managers, Colonel Steve Fondacaro and Dr. Montgomery McFate, interlock with the history of deinstitutionalization and reengagement with sociocultural knowledge within the U.S. military, and the response of the American Anthropology Association to the program (chapter 2 and 5, respectively). The biography of Ayala and Cooper is explained alongside the history of Maiwand (chapter 4). This effective device helps ensure the personal content is understood in relation to the issues inherent to the war and HTS as topics and time both shift.

Perhaps one of the most surprising aspects of Gezari's book is her biography of Salam himself. In traveling to Afghanistan, Gezari has added an additional layer of description and explanation others would negate. In

interviewing family members and local villagers about the incident, and the possible reasons for the attack—which ranged from Taliban bribery, Taliban extortion, mental instability, and extremist sympathies—the reader is offered a full panoply of issues to consider. Sadly, with Salam long dead, the truth will never be known or understood.

What certainly makes the book valuable is the nearly 100 pages of discursive notes. For a program that has been treated to uncritical promotion and overly negative condemnation, these notes add authentic evidence to the debate. This is a particular problem for the critics of HTS within the anthropology discipline who have (without irony) offered ferocious and vitriolic commentary devoid of genuine research and primary sources while simultaneously declaring the program guilty of unethical behavior.

The comprehensiveness of Gezari's account can have some odd side effects, however. She engages with a number of detailed issues about the program, such as the contested genesis story of HTS, which has been "embellished by ambitious and therefore potentially unreliable narrators who nevertheless, each holds a piece of the story" (pp. 23–24). She also discusses the atypical biography of McFate and accusations relating to corporate espionage (p. 118). Yet a final answer on these issues is not stated. The reader is left to ponder which declaration is correct. This may have been intentional in noting the relative claims of competing individuals, but it can be disconcerting in one's search for the final answer.

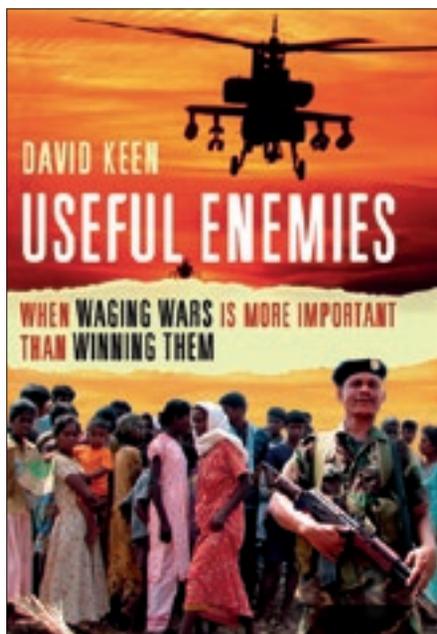
Additionally, because of the highly focused and personal narrative style, the reader is left with the impression that every team beyond Loyd's was incompetent. The other teams in Afghanistan mentioned are primarily negative examples. Gezari's story, and therefore the reader, is blind to the actions of others deployed. This is not to deny that the actions described (pp. 162, 182–185) are proof of incompetence, merely that they are the actions of a few people among many hundreds who have gone into two theaters, operated with a range of units, and even operated

independently with special operations forces, all in a variety of circumstances.

But these are minor quibbles. The story of November 4, 2008, is a terrible one, but it has been told masterfully. As former HTS Program Manager Colonel Sharon Hamilton previously stated, “The HTS story is one of challenges, rewards, stumbles, and successes.” In a program often overwhelmed with polemical accusations, Gezari’s work stands out as sober, rigorous, and appreciated. *The Tender Soldier* is therefore a welcome addition to the literature on the Decade of War. JFQ

---

Michael C. Davies is one of the coauthors of *Human Terrain Teams: An Organizational Innovation for Sociocultural Knowledge in Irregular Warfare* (Institute of World Politics, 2013).



### Useful Enemies: When Waging Wars Is More Important Than Winning Them

By David Keen  
Yale University Press, 2012  
311 pp. \$38  
ISBN 978-0-300-16274-5

Reviewed by  
William A. Taylor

In *Useful Enemies*, David Keen (professor of conflict studies at the London School of Economics) explores both the causes of conflict and the varied factors that perpetuate war. Military leaders, policymakers, analysts, scholars, and general readers interested in the complex dynamics of warfare should find the work engaging. Keen’s thesis is controversial: “This book suggests that a great many wars are resistant to ending for the simple (but hidden) reason that powerful actors (both local and international) *do not want* them to end. . . . Very often, powerful actors may simply pursue other priorities that conflict with the expressed goal of winning (actions that may have the *effect* of reproducing the enemy, or that may simply take time, energy and resources away from ‘winning’)” (pp. 8–9).

Keen implores readers to consider why many contemporary conflicts last so long, especially given that often one side holds a significant military advantage. His answer is that winning wars in the military sense frequently takes a secondary priority to simply waging them for economic, political, or even psychological reasons. As Keen argues, “I want to stress that winning is only *one part* of war (and sometimes a surprisingly small part)” (p. 10). To make his case, Keen explores the underlying causes of conflict in such diverse places as Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Uganda, Angola, Sri Lanka, Guatemala, and Colombia. He utilizes evidence from his own wide-ranging travels including personal interviews with participants, journalists, aid workers, and human rights advocates. He also delves deeply into nongovernmental organization reports and scholarly works.

Keen organizes his book into nine chapters that collectively explore three alternative motivations for conflict other than the conventional explanation of winning wars militarily. First (chapters 1–4 and 8), he focuses on economics by exploring the role of diamonds in Sierra Leone, oil in Sudan, gold and coltan in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, cocaine in Colombia, and the

existence of “ghost soldiers” (p. 28) in Uganda whose pay was syphoned off by profiteering officers. Economically, he also examines the impact of international aid on conflict. Keen argues that in Afghanistan “it is very hard to channel large amounts of aid through corrupt and abusive regimes without reinforcing corruption and abuse” (p. 69) and thus prolonging war. Keen develops the intriguing concept of “international blind spots,” maintaining that “This ‘statist’ bias has been reflected in a much greater willingness, generally, to sanction abusive rebel movements than abusive governments” (p. 44).

Second (chapters 5–7), Keen examines politics as a cause of conflict. Countering common depictions of contemporary hostilities that focus solely on “ethnic hatreds,” he develops the useful concept of “political adaptation” that occurred in the former Yugoslavia when communism gave way to nationalism based on ethnicity as the currency of local politics (p. 103). He provides similar insights into the political (as opposed to solely ethnic) dimensions of the complexities of genocide in both Darfur and Rwanda. Keen perceptively reminds readers that policymakers often manipulate conflict for political purposes. As he contends, “Discovering the most important fault-lines in any particular conflict is made more difficult by the fact that a misreading is often *intended*.” For example, the manipulation of ethnic divisions by elite groups will ‘work’ better when people see—and are encouraged to see—ethnic fault-lines as natural and inevitable” (p. 115).

Third (chapter 9), Keen explores psychological motivations for starting and perpetuating conflict, especially the role of shame. As Keen explains, “Crucially, the avoidance of shame—and conversely the pursuit of respect—represents another important goal that departs from the commonly assumed aim of ‘winning’” (p. 195). Keen connects this important factor to relative deprivation: “Significantly, it is not necessarily poverty that causes shame, but the interaction of poverty and wealth, the juxtaposition of ‘underdevelopment’ and a development