



## **Every Man in This Village is a Liar: An Education in War**

*Megan K. Stack*

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**A shattering account of war and disillusionment from a young woman reporter on the front lines of the war on terror.**

A few weeks after the planes crashed into the World Trade Center on 9/11, journalist Megan K. Stack, a twenty-five-year-old national correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, was thrust into Afghanistan and Pakistan, dodging gunmen and prodding warlords for information. From there, she traveled to war-ravaged Iraq and Lebanon and other countries scarred by violence, including Israel, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, witnessing the changes that swept the Muslim world and laboring to tell its stories.

*Every Man in This Village Is a Liar* is Megan K. Stack's riveting account of what she saw in the combat zones and beyond. She relates her initial wild excitement and her slow disillusionment as the cost of violence outweighs the elusive promise of freedom and democracy. She reports from under bombardment in Lebanon; records the raw pain of suicide bombings in Israel and Iraq; and, one by one, marks the deaths and disappearances of those she interviews.

Beautiful, savage, and unsettling, *Every Man in This Village Is a Liar* is a memoir about the wars of the twenty-first century that readers will long remember.

## **Every Man in This Village is a Liar: An Education in War Details**

Date : Published June 15th 2010 by Doubleday

ISBN : 9780385527163

Author : Megan K. Stack

Format : Hardcover 272 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, War, Autobiography, Memoir, Writing, Journalism, History



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## From Reader Review Every Man in This Village is a Liar: An Education in War for online ebook

### Jennifer (JC-S) says

‘You can survive and not survive, both at the same time.’

A number of books have been written by journalists and others about the events in Iraq and Afghanistan following the events of September 11 2001. This book offers a different perspective. On 11 September, Megan Stack, a national correspondent for the Los Angeles Times, was holidaying in Paris. Shortly after, she was assigned to Afghanistan to cover the US invasion. From there, she travelled to Iraq and Lebanon, to Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Libya and Yemen witnessing a number of the changes then sweeping the Muslim world. This book does not contain the stories she filed from those locations, instead it is a description of her experiences in the region, and her responses to those experiences.

Megan Stack writes of herself: ‘So I was a reporter who didn’t really know how to write about combat, covering America from outside its borders as it crashed zealously into war and occupation.’

In Megan’s Stack’s assessment, the violence that distorts life in the Middle East is the explosive consequence of authoritarian regimes, sectarian divisions, and short-sighted American foreign policy. However, this is not a book about states and solutions; it is a book about individuals and impressions. It is more about consequences than causes. And it’s important, because through Megan Stack we meet some of the people who are also caught up in the so-called ‘War on Terror’ because of where they are. The ‘War on Terror’ may be ‘essentially nothing but a unifying myth for a complicated scramble of mixed impulses and social theories and night terrors and cruelty and business interests, all overhung with the unassailible memory of falling skyscrapers.’ But it has a significant impact on the lives (and deaths) of many people in the cities of Amman, Baghdad, Cairo, Jerusalem and Tripoli as well as in Afghanistan.

‘In a nest of man-made things, the flesh is the first to go.’

As Megan Stack moves from Afghanistan in 2001, to Baghdad in 2003 and then to Beirut in 2005 she writes of both the human costs of these invasions and the cost of alliances with Mubarak, Qaddafi and with Saudi Arabia. I wonder what she would think of the developments in 2011?

‘War is a total change, unleashing all things light and all things dark; we are pushed forward and our lives are invented by the history we live through.’

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

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### Trish says

Stack uses language like a paintbrush in this memoir of her time covering the Middle East and South Asia as a reporter for the L.A. Times. In fact, she became a foreign correspondent by accident: being in Europe when the Twin Towers fell, she stumbled into Afghanistan. Throughout the book I have highlighted passages that capture light:

I left Afghanistan--the light that falls like powder on the poppy fields, the mortars stacked like firewood in broken-down sheds at the abandoned terror compounds, the throaty green of the mineral rivers. In the back of the car, I stared into a scrubbed sky as empty plains slipped past.

And then I was at my mother's house in Connecticut, walking known floorboards, the same naked trees in the windows, blocked by familiar walls. The silence of the house screamed in my ears, and my bones and skin hung like shed snakeskin that wouldn't fall away.

But Stack also captures the sense (or the nonsense) of the Middle East, and in a gut-wrenching final analysis makes the divisions between countrymen in Lebanon sound so much like the deadlock in the current U.S. political situation one wants to wail in sorrow. Instead of transforming the Middle East in our image (George W. Bush's *raison d'être*), we are becoming more like them.

The final chapter of Stack's mideast tour introduces us to a young man in Baghdad in 2006, and if her description of his wasted life doesn't make you grind your teeth in frustration and fury, you have already passed to the netherworld.

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### **Hannah Norris says**

this book made me want to light myself on fire

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### **Paul Mullen says**

Megan Stack's memoir of being a reporter in just about every trouble-stricken country of the Middle East is a shocker. I gave it 4 stars because of the way it stretched me, not because "I really liked it" as the pop-up guidance suggests for 4 stars.

Her ability to describe with simile and carefully chosen illustration is so good that you can almost smell the smells and hear the sounds. At times I smiled at how creative her prose was to the point where I may have missed her point.

But her point in the end is that the global war on terror is:

- Not straightforward to sort out
- Having disastrous consequences for many who are the poorest and most helpless
- Apparently leaving broken countries and people and economies and infrastructure with little good to show.

She admits to being tone deaf to the purposes that non-Arabs have in this campaign against terrorism.

Though she cannot sort it out, I guess that many others see it more clearly. But to read her descriptions of on-the-ground ambiguity, pain, joy, fear, determination, destruction, collegiality, and suspicion are worth the time regardless of whether you personally can sense purpose in the efforts to end terrorism.

I left the book thinking, "I know why the USA and others have intervened to combat terrorism; I wonder if our methods are having any useful or lasting impact. What might a better way be?"

Highly recommended. I don't give 4 stars often.

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### **Mark says**

"You can survive and not survive, both at the same time."

War on Terror! Manifest or farce? Megan Stack, a foreign correspondent for the LA Times, attempts to answer that question. Shortly after 9/11, Stack found herself thrust into the Middle East, spending the next six years, in various hot zones: Afghanistan, occupied Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Libya, Saudi Arabia and a few others.

Stack's first hand account of many atrocities is eye-opening and gut-wrenching. She befriends a variety of people in each of these dangerous locales, putting a human face on these tragedies. She is able to witness the myriad of lies and deceptions and experience the ugly hatreds, that fuel and drive these regions. Her prose is both tough and beautiful. She is a daring, unflinching journalist, looking directly into the horrible face of war.

"Only after covering it for years did I understand that the war on terror never really existed. It was not a real thing. Not that the war on terror was flawed, not that it was cynical or self-defeating, or likely to breed more resentment and violence. But that it was hollow, it was essentially nothing but a unifying myth for a complicated scramble of mixed impulses and social theories and night terrors and cruelty and business interests."

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### **Carolyn says**

Hmmm - I have a lot of non-fiction.

The cover, title and flap sucked me in. She writes for the L A Times - figured she would be a better writer. If you can wade through the flowery language and imagery that she piles on, the experience is pretty interesting. But, she's a war correspondent - put on your big girl panties and write like one.

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### **Denise says**

Picking up right after 9/11, this beautifully written memoir by a foreign correspondent for the Los Angeles Times follows Megan Stack's time spent in a succession of Middle Eastern countries. She was on the ground during the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon, reported from places like Yemen, Jordan, Libya and Saudi Arabia, and explored the Israel-Palestine conflict while living in Jerusalem. Interesting, insightful and deeply moving.

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### **Claire Grasse says**

Afghanistan. Iraq. Iran. Israel. Palestine. Libya. Syria. Yemen.

Megan Stack has given us a conscience-ripping look at the wars in the Middle East, the mostly-civilian casualties, and the utter, irredeemable waste of it all. For the most part the author doesn't attempt to take sides or to make political statements. She just presents the things she saw and heard and smelled, in all their tragedy and horror - the things the media won't show us, and lets America make up its own mind about what the bloody hell we're doing over there.

In speaking of America's ability to glance at the Middle East situation, shrug, and go on, she says this: "It occurs to me now that maybe this is the most American trait of all, the trademark of these wars. To be there and be gone all at once, to tell ourselves it just happened, we did what we did but we had no control over the consequences."

Indeed, to read this book is to become accountable, and to call into question everything you've ever heard or believed about the necessity of preserving "the American way of life" at the cost of human life. Pity you if you are able to read this book and remain unmoved.

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### **Mary Carrasco says**

This is a memoir based on Megan K. Stack's journalistic travels through several war torn, Middle Eastern countries.

The writing is beautiful. War is not. So, it felt to me that the author's use of sweet, flowery writing was at odds with the stink and rot of the violence of war. Perhaps that was part of the message here; The incongruity of death and devastation with the beauty of the Middle Eastern landscape, it's culture and people.

In my opinion, this book often felt disjointed. It left me wondering what was this story really about. Was it the war that continues to rage on? Was it the beauty of these ravished countries? Or was it about the life struggles of the people that the author met along the way? Ms. Stack touched on each of these things in a fairly short book when in reality, she could have written several based on her experiences.

On the down side, this book left me with more questions than answers and I supposed that in the same breath, this was a positive thing. It succeeded in piquing my curiosity and left me with a desire to learn more about Middle Eastern culture and politics.

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### **mz says**

My high school, college, and law school education didn't do it. Keeping up to date with "the news" didn't do it. Even working with Iraqi refugees didn't do it. But this book did.

It made me care--and care deeply--about the moral and political ramifications of the United States's (and other nations and groups') violent actions in the Middle East. And it made me determined to learn more about how my taxpayer dollars are being used in this sensitive region.

If the complexity and foreignness of the Middle East's politics has always been a convenient excuse for

ignorance (as it was for me), I hope you read this book.

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### **Rebecca says**

*Every Man in This Village Is a Liar* is one of the most moving works--whether books, magazines, newspaper or online articles--I've read about America's War on Terror and the long term consequences of Western meddling (or not-so-benevolent neglect) in Middle Eastern politics since the discovery of oil under Saudi Arabian sands, the creation of Israel, and the start of the Cold War. Megan Stack does, in these hysterical times when there's a terrorist hiding under every bed, the impossible: she humanizes *everyone* and spares none, Muslim Brotherhood and Hezbollah members, Iraqi Sunnis, Americans, Israelis, Afghan and Yemeni tribesmen, Syrian soldiers, Libyan bureaucrats, everyone who's unfortunate enough to be in the way of power. Stack's memoir of her war reporting for the *Los Angeles Times* is beautifully summed up by this quote on pages 242-243:

"But up close the war on terror isn't anything but the sick and feeble cringing in an asylum, babies in shocks, structure smashed. Baghdad broken. Afghanistan broken, Egypt broken. The line between heaven and earth, broken. Lebanon broken. Broken peace and broken roads and broken bridges. The broken faith and years of broken promises. Children inheriting their parents' broken hearts, growing up with a taste for vengeance. And all along, America dreaming its deep sweet dream, there and not there. America chasing phantoms, running uphill to nowhere in pursuit of a receding mirage of absolute safety."

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### **Rebecca Olson says**

This was one of the best books I've read in years - and I don't usually enjoy non-fiction. It is an incredibly beautiful, moving account of a journalist's time in the Middle East this past decade. It is difficult to describe what the book is about, and I hesitate to write anything at all because I won't do her work justice. Her account is interesting because it is both fact-based journalism and personal observation; I got the feeling that the impulse for the book was stories (or seeds of stories) she wanted to report on while there, but that the LA Times wasn't interested in printing. Her writing is honest and beautiful; both lyric and specific. From the first sentence I immediately found myself transported. I learned more about the differences between and challenges facing the numerous cultures, countries and regimes in the Middle East, than I have from any other fiction or non-fiction source before. Most importantly, she shows the beauty and humanity she discovers as well, and holds up a mirror to the West, pointing out our own political and cultural untruths, half-truths and inconsistencies (lest we get too smug or superior.) And yet, more than anything, I came away from this book with a much deeper, more profound appreciation for my freedoms and the ease of life I take for granted.

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### **Marci says**

Megan K. Stack spent years as a war journalist in the Middle East and her writing about her time there is superb. It's a hard book for me because I was for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and yet what you see from her writing is that the people suffering mostly end up being innocent civilians. She also writes about problems in Jordan, Libya, Lebanon, Israel, etc.. I think this next quote ably describes the overall feeling in her book:

"I am covering the wars. It all matters. It is worth everything. You turn yourself into something separate, something absent. There and not there. It works, putting thick glass between you and the world. You can be anywhere if you're not really there. You can walk into any room, drive down any road, ask any question, write about anybody's pain. You tell yourself you are unscathed. You stand smooth and count yourself unaffected. And basically, it's true--compared with the people around you, the civilians and soldiers, you are unscathed and unaffected. That works fine until all of a sudden it doesn't work at all. It occurs to me now that maybe this is the most American trait of all, the trademark of these wars. To be there and be gone all at once, to tell ourselves it just happened, we did what we did but we had no control over the consequences."

You can tell that Ms. Stack has been deeply affected by the wars and she portrays the mess she finds in the Middle East in vivid detail.

Interesting book, beautifully written, no solutions presented to the difficulties overseas, just vignettes on what life is like for the ordinary people who get caught up in the violence.

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### **Sally Embury-thomas says**

Hated this book. Picked it up to read for the Vce English class next year but I thought it was very unlikeable. For starters it is a topic that I just don't know enough about. That is shocking of me and I should be more informed about the politics of that area but I just find it deadly boring. So it's not a book I would normally pick up. Then the way this woman writes is so strange and flowery. A taxi ride becomes an interminable couple of pages of prose. She obviously has tickets on herself - every man and his dog seems to find her attractive and she flits around the Middle East in a bewildering time-frame. I found myself asking where is she now and how long ago was she there? This ties in well with those students who are doing Conflict as a Context and are maybe politically aware of the goings on in that region but for my class of students I think it's a definite No from me

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### **Greg says**

After I finished *Every Man in This Village Is a Liar* on the train today, I walked home up the hill asking myself: what compels me to read these books about war? It's obviously not because I need to be convinced about how horrible it is. The best answer I could come up with was that I simply want to know what it's really like. To have someone who was an eyewitness tell me: I stared war right in the face, I saw it tear people's lives apart. There is something harrowingly addictive, at least for a short while, about being plunged into a firsthand account of experiences that only filter down to us through the news. Megan Stack's epigraph, an Arthur Miller quote, says it all: "There is nothing farther away from Washington than the entire world." More sobering is her assertion, which takes that a step further: "We are losing interest and we fear it means nothing."

For me, and for the billions who've been watching this war for eight years, we may think we are all too aware of it when we see an article or a report about a suicide bombing or insurgent attacks or Taliban kidnappings. But as much as we'd hate to admit it, what we're really thinking is, "So what?" Not that we don't care about the lives lost and terror inflicted, but--who is not helplessly jaded and disgusted? I got home from the train and went on to the New York Times. There was the headline:

## **NATO Raid Ends Kabul Attack; Heavily Armed Fighters Stormed Hotel**

I could hardly have been less surprised.

Now of course, the repressed in many of the nations that Stack spent years reporting from (starting at age 25) have started to rise up, reject their despotic regimes, and turn toward democracy, which makes *Every Man in This Village Is a Liar* a timely and often powerful read on the heels of the Arab Spring. It's beautifully written (though in some places overwritten, almost forcibly poetic) and offers a rare, sweeping firsthand view of a part of the world that seems like it might never know peace and normalcy.

Anyone who reads this should be grateful for Stack's truly vivid observations about the human toll of the atrocities of war, unbearable truths about the physical, political, and psychological reach of it that remind us we can't just make the old Middle East disappear through the "hollow...unifying myth" called a "war on terror." She covers the elections quashed by Egypt's police; Qaddafi's grip on Libya, which is so tight that no one in the country dares to utter dissent; Saudi Arabia's astonishingly institutionalized misogyny and its collusion with America over oil; an affable Iraqi youth who meets Stack at a Baghdad hotel, at his peril, to describe the better life he imagines for himself; and maybe most devastatingly, a respected female Al-Jazeera reporter who's murdered after trying to cover a shrine bombing in Iraq. Each location finds Stack more and more disillusioned, until near the end, while Israel's bombs rain down on her in Lebanon, she is reminded most horrifically of one of the first things she knew about war, an idea perhaps "as true for nations as individuals: You can survive and not survive, both at the same time."

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