

More Than 43,000 People Killed In Bam...

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I've just used a 'network-style' headline to catch your attention in case you don't recall the 2003 earthquake in Iran and the human tragedy in the ancient city of Bam, shortly after Iran was declared a member of the 'axis of evil' and a hotbed of Islamic extremism. One of those killed then was an American and now that story is being told in [BAM 6.6](#), a beautiful documentary that premiered at the National Cathedral in Washington earlier this year. Set against the quake's backdrop of death and destruction, it captures both the indomitable will of the human spirit and the pervasive and altruistic culture of Iranian hospitality, kindness and generosity. It is a human drama that transcends borders, cultures, religions and politics and showcases a good example of an important factor that's been repeatedly overlooked in our policy-making efforts, that of people to people. This is a portrait of the Iranian people that you have never seen before.

But headlines today have shifted to Afghanistan and its people and I must ask, what do we really know about [this country and those 33 million people?](#) What lessons have we learned from our dealings with those issues in Iraq and Iran? We might remember the country's more recent history that saw the failed involvement of approximately 120,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan [1979-1989], at a cost of approximately 14,500 Soviet casualties and an estimated one million Afghan lives... and they couldn't even establish government authority outside of Kabul.



The following books will give you a perspective of our involvement there in this 9/11 era. First is Gary Berntsen's [*Jawbreaker*](#), which offers glimpses of the rugged Afghan landscape prior to the USS Cole tragedy and the Twin Towers turning point, along with the kickoff of the *Operation*

Enduring Freedom campaign against al-Qaeda and the Taliban forces. Then Rory Stewart's incredible experiences in [*The Places In Between*](#) will transport you into the villages that he visited during his three-month walk across the country, just six weeks after the Taliban had been driven from power. You learn about the roots of Afghan hospitality and gain an understanding of where these values come from. It will be impossible for any policy makers to change this core of Afghan society without developing the imagination needed to understand his diverse experiences. Stewart, who is now the director of the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, is also the founder and chief executive of the [*Turquoise Mountain Foundation*](#), a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the Afghan communities. He is a voice to be heard. [*His recent lecture at a Boston University program*](#) pulled no punches. He offers us a

genuine understanding of the Afghan people, their traditions and their poverty as he enumerates the predicaments that we face there today. Rory's unique experiences throughout this region sets his words far apart from the rest of the pack and make them 'more than worthy' of everyone's consideration. Start paying attention to Afghanistan if you haven't been.

Stewart is a very special individual. He detailed his observations while working as a provincial official in Iraq in his 2006 [*The Prince of the Marshes*](#). His words are equally penetrating as well and add credibility to his assessments of Afghanistan, thoughts on its realistic future and our options. Eventually the questions for our President will come down to these, *What Does It Mean To Win? What Can We Win in Afghanistan? Who Will Decide When The Outcome Is Successful? and What Will Be The True Cost?* There may be battles yet to be fought in that region but there are no wars to be won; there are only lives to be lost.

Watch... read... spread the word... get involved. Bob