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A Debate Won't Stop War With Iran

Posted by Greg Scoble at 7:50 AM


As before, we're letting a bunch of ignorant, sloppy-thinking politicians and politicized foreign-policy experts draw "red line" ultimatums. As before, we're letting them quick-march us off to war. This time their target is Iran. And heaven knows Iran's leaders are bad guys capable of doing dangerous things. But if we've learned anything, anything at all, from plunging into war in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, it is this: we must have a public scrubbing of fighting rhetoric before, not after, the war begins. - [Leslie Gelb](#)

You frequently heard from people who opposed the second Iraq war that the war was conducted without any "proper debate." This never struck me as all that convincing - I remember reading nothing else during 2002 and 2003. Rather, it was wishful thinking based on a flawed premise - that had the public been given adequate time and information they would have opposed the war and that that opposition would have stayed the hands of the Bush administration.

Instead, I think Justin Logan [has the dynamic right](#):

The point is that the public may have some inchoate, a priori opinions about foreign policy, but they don't matter all that much when it comes to influencing foreign policy.

To the extent that an avalanche of op-eds convinces elites and policy-makers that a U.S. attack on Iran's nuclear facilities would be a bad idea, a "public" debate is mostly irrelevant. Of course, if the Obama administration or its GOP successor were to actually ask Congress to declare war on Iran prior to a U.S. attack we might have some back-and-forth over the issue. But that would never happen.

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