

The League of ordinary gentlemen

Trust Me, Kids — Peace Is Actually Pretty Awesome

by Jason Kuznicki on March 16, 2012

[James Fallows continues the Iran War watch](#). I can hardly believe, after all this country has been through, that we are seriously considering another war. Sold to us, I'd add, by [the very same people who sold us the Iraq War](#). And on the very same terms.

I spent yesterday afternoon talking to some exceptionally smart high school students about the Cato Institute, its mission, and its activities. Selfishly, I left a lot of time for questions. I always learn a lot when I do.

My talk had emphasized Cato's commitment to peace and nonintervention, and possibly as a result most of the questions centered on foreign policy. Almost all of these were based on three premises: (1) We will attack Iran very soon (2) Attacking Iran will be in our national interests (3) There's nothing morally wrong with attacking Iran, either.

This puzzled me — until I realized that these kids probably don't remember *not* being at war. The oldest of them were seven years old on 9/11. Some, presumably, were three. If so, then war is the only thing they can recall, and a new war is to them maybe something a lot like a new transportation bill or a new federal bureau: momentarily newsworthy, but also kind of banal.

This ought to be regarded as a singular national failure, one that we had somehow never yet managed to commit — or even dream about. I mean, sure, kids grow up during war. But to be entering adulthood, and not to remember anything *else*? Wow.

It's a new kind of war, too. In the old wars, there were clear-cut enemies, legal declarations, and expectations on both sides regarding surrender and the return to normalcy. It worked sort of like this: Two sides, each consisting of nation-states or groups thereof, declared war on each other. The side that got the most badly beat up eventually surrendered, and the winner dictated the terms of the peace.

In new wars, no one ever declares anything. We just beat up on a country that did not and cannot attack us. Then we stay there, playing havoc with its domestic politics, spurring nationalist resentment, and getting blown up by IEDs — until the poll numbers drop and we decide it's time to go home.

What would a war with Iran actually look like? Let's briefly compare it to Iraq.

At the start of the second Iraq War, [Iraq had an army of 375,000](#). [Iran has 545,000](#), with the possibility of mobilizing many more. Iraq had been crippled by years of sanctions, no-fly zones, and the previous Gulf War, from which it never fully rebuilt. Iran is almost four times as large as Iraq. Iran has 78 million people; Iraq, 30 million.

Which is not to say that we would lose the war. We wouldn't, for the very simple reason that the terms "win" and "lose" are obsolete. Both were rituals of old war, and we aren't fighting old wars anymore.

In new wars, the United States *never* loses. It's just a question of how much we feel like exhausting and embarrassing ourselves. Iran presents an excellent opportunity in both regards. More and more, it looks like we're going to jump at the chance. Yet again.