

Borgman, Dean. (2003) "Helping young people face U.S. war in the Middle East and elsewhere," S. Hamilton, MA: Center for Youth Studies.

Many Americans seem able just to go about their business despite crises in the world. High school students are no exception to that. Most of them have very full schedules, school demands a lot of them, there may be work at home. Friends are a very important part of life. Then, there's the distractions of television, Email, IMs, the internet, video games, and so much more.

Disasters such as the tsunami, sensationally highlighted in the news, may exceptionally bring temporary concern. Rwanda and Sudan float in and out of consciousness around the world. But too often little is done. We develop a numbness, apathy or even cynicism.

Still, some young people have wondered about war in Afghanistan and then Iraq. Is it right? Would I ever have to go? Will it end or bring more terrorism? Was the U. S. doing the right thing... when the UN would not consent, when so many countries opposed, when most of the people in many nations were so strong against near unilateral action, when many were protesting in the U.S. itself?

Democracies must debate and disagree. Most agree the time for dissent is before the war begins. But even after a decision is made, even after a war is over, it deserves to be questioned in a democracy.

Discussion about war involves deciding if war is every justified, and then, for those who think war may sometimes be necessary, reviewing the cases for and against a particular war.

There are the pacifists. For them war is never right, never an option. Eye for an eye with weapons of mass destruction can leave everyone dead. A united world must give peace a chance. People of good will must set an example that will unite our divided world. The Middle East needs dignity, to find its own way, to be given aid for development, and listened to for our mutual understanding.

Many more opposed the 2003 Iraq war—its timing and the way it was carried out. They may have wanted the UN inspectors and diplomacy to be given more time. They may have been for a UN mandate, or at least a larger coalition. The invasion of Iraq brought casualties to our soldiers, to those of the Coalition, and to Iraqi civilians. It further alienated Middle Eastern and Arab nations. Billions of dollars needed for health care and social causes in the U.S. and other countries went to the war effort. Respect for the UN may have been diminished and undo important alliances been weakened. To some extent terrorism in Iraq and worldwide may have been stimulated. Saddam was a ruthless dictator, but some argue there were other ways to limit his power if not bring him down. This position stands against a pre-emptive invasion of a sovereign country.

Then, there are many who are undecided or ambivalent about the war. They saw Saddam as a ruthless tyrant (killing well over a million of his own people and a million others besides). They saw Saddam also as dangerous. With help from a surprising assortment of countries, he, at one time at least was developing weapons of mass destruction—some of which were used. He was dangerous to us and to his region—not only to Israel but other countries as well as his invasion of Kuwait demonstrated. Still, war may have been a greater danger for reasons articulated in the paragraph above. The world needs to be more united against such evils. But can countries—all with their own agendas—come together to confront issues like this?

Another group is sure that war was the right thing for reasons explained by President Bush. They trusted his leadership completely. They hoped the war would be brief and successful, that it would break the stalemate in the Middle East and, in time, bring nations together again. They see this war as being a key blow against forces bent on defeating democracies by any means necessary, and as an opportunity to spread democracies in the Middle East and around the world.

A final extreme group may glory in war and the power of the U.S. Suicide bombers and terrorists, chemical and nuclear warfare are making this world look more and more like a jungle. In such a world only force and might are respected. A talk show host speaks of President Jimmy Carter's vacillation when Iranians held US citizens hostage as a low point of U.S. history and the beginning of disrespect for us in the Middle East. We should have blasted Iran no matter what. Force is all such people understand and respect. Might makes right.

Five positions; do you see yourself with any of these perspectives? How have you seen this critical time of history? What are your reasons for believing what you do?

Now we are in a war. What might be the best possible outcome? the worst case? the most probable outcomes of this conflict? While most Americans believe it is now the duty of all of us to support the President as Commander-in-Chief and our troops doing the fighting, it is still important to think, to question, and to discuss. Many will be praying; most hoping for the loss of life and devastation be as minimal as possible.

President Bush and even more so, Prime Minister Tony Blair, have a great deal on the line. Blair may not even last the war. What would make this war successful? Most would agree it must be

Ø brief

Ø with a minimum of casualties

Ø with Iraqi military being neutralized

Ø with Saddam and his sons being brought down, captured or killed

Ø with weapons of mass destruction being discovered

Ø and finally with a minimum of devastation, dislocation, physical suffering and social chaos among the different peoples of Iraq.

The opposite, a long and dragged out war, which fails to displace Hussein or discover weapons of mass destruction, a conflict that inflicts terrible casualties and suffering, will make Bush and Blair, more than laughing stocks, villains to many in the world, leaders who will lose an honorable place in history.

Finally, and crucially important, what of the war's aftermath? Our record in Afghanistan is not altogether laudable or promising. We have not given nearly the aid promised, we have not secured the country outside of Kabul, we have not seen traditional injustice to women erased. And Afghanistan is once again an important exporter of heroin—something the Taliban stopped.

Young people need a voice about going to war, how wars are carried out, and especially how to achieve peace. There are notable peace organizations of youth around the world, especially in Latin America. Some of us believe there should be a peace academy along side our three military

academies. With women, young people may be the most successful peace-makers in the world.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Why is it so difficult to discuss this issue from different perspectives?
2. Do you agree that democracies express different opinions on controversial subjects?
3. Are families and youth groups missing something, if such subjects are not given careful consideration and all parties listened to?
4. What is your opinion on current wars and on this article above?

IMPLICATIONS

1. War is incredibly costly in lives and resources, and in its effects on societies and world culture. It must be carefully considered.
2. We must do better in listening to differing opinions, in agreeing to disagree when necessary.
3. The idea of loving our enemies relates, both to those who attack us, and those whose opinions are opposite our own.

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