

# Prologue

This book asks readers to break out of a dominant way of thinking about world affairs that focuses on negativity and drowns out progress. If we turn off the screech of alarmist “news” and overblown political rhetoric for a moment and look at hard evidence objectively, we find that many people in the world are working hard for peace and in fact the world is becoming more peaceful. For this shocking idea to sink in requires either a paradigm shift or at least a broken TV set.

For those who are sure wars are getting worse all the time and that peace is an illusion, and will not believe any amount of evidence I produce to the contrary, I have one question: “Compared to what?” Take the situation in Iraq in 2011—a terrible mess, Americans still getting killed by insurgents, civilians dying, the population unhappy, the government needing eight months to get organized after an election, the potential for civil war after the departure of U.S. forces. All true, and more, but “compared to what?” Compared to a few years ago when Sunni-Shiite sectarian violence ravaged the country? Compared to the period of the U.S. invasion in 2003, the looting, and the insurgency? Or compared to how Iraq *would* be if the United States had not botched the invasion? Or how it would be if fairies sprinkled magic dust over the country to end sectarian strife, corruption, and electricity shortages?

The ability to distinguish between bad (Iraq today) and worse (Iraq a few years ago) unlocks a profound understanding of today's world situation. The world is going from worse to bad, from the fire to the frying pan. Good news—unless you are freaked out by the frying pan and so upset by the “bad” coming at you constantly in the news that you cannot compare it with anything.

With the frying pan still pretty hot, it is easy to assume that war is getting worse, and can never get better, because everyone knows that war is inevitable. But if we look past the heat and smoke, a radical notion emerges in this book. War among human beings is not inevitable. Rather, the end of war, though also not inevitable, is possible. The possibility of an end to war is not something to be ridiculed, but to be pursued.

I hope that this story, one that tours some of the most awful war-torn places on earth but that is ultimately about peace, will inspire readers to see—through the continuing fog of war—our best qualities as human beings: our ability to communicate, to empathize, to cooperate, and to create a safer, freer, more prosperous world for our children.