

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**BLOOD AND TREASURE; PUTTING PERSPECTIVE INTO THE NUMBERS FROM
IRAQ**

by

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ABSTRACT

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The national debate surrounding America's involvement in Iraq is complex and confusing. While it has been full of vitriol and invective, it has been notably lacking in balance, perspective and texture. In the middle of this national debate are the American warrior and an immediate group of family and supporters. More often than not, these fully committed participants remain quiet while listening to the raging war of words, or watching it on television sets in Iraq. The national debate is divisive, and at times, the American warrior is wounded by the words and the emotion that animate it. This project is designed to bring historical perspective and comparative statistics to the debate over American foreign policy in Iraq, thus facilitating a more informed national discussion on a question of major importance.

BLOOD AND TREASURE; THE PERSPECTIVE BEHIND THE NUMBERS FROM IRAQ

In November 2005, I came home on mid-tour leave from Iraq. I was very proud of our efforts to date, which included helping to facilitate a successful constitutional referendum. I fully expected the U.S. airwaves to be full of stories about this accomplishment and other American accomplishments in Iraq up to that point in time. I found out quickly however that my expectations were misplaced.

There is an old saying that "timing is everything." Unfortunately, the successful referendum could not have come at a worse time. This news was almost immediately eclipsed by another news story: the milestone of 2,000 American deaths in both Iraq and Afghanistan. While this event was newsworthy, it seemed to totally drown out any good news coming from Iraq. For the two weeks that I was home, the story that filled all media outlets was one of doom and gloom. The successful referendum was quickly dismissed and forgotten.

About one week into my visit home, I had a meeting with the spouses of my deployed Marines and sailors. I had received a couple of calls of concern about the war in Iraq. The spouses I would meet with were outwardly, universally supportive of the war in Iraq and their deployed mates. But they were also news junkies: and the media coverage had them wondering if their sacrifices were worth the effort. They asked me to address whether or not I felt our efforts in Iraq were worth the costs we were paying. I had a crucial task before me.

It is never easy for a government, on its own, to try to shift the terms of the debate- the effort ends up looking like propaganda. But the work of leaders and commanders who need to inspire the troops and those who support them can go far in the essential task of maintaining national morale, a central element of Clausewitz's trinity of the people, the government and the warriors. Commanders at all levels must think through the meaning of the war in Iraq, the stakes, and the sacrifices the nation is making. They need to be prepared to articulate the case for seeing the job through to completion, and thereby bolstering American national security.

In this project, I will put forward a perspective on the war that is oriented not only to those in the military, but also to those among the American public whose support is crucial if we are to move forward in Iraq and enhance stability in the Middle East. I will attempt to put the loss of life into everyday and historical perspective, explain the actual tax dollar cost to everyday Americans, and document how America's new greatest generation has volunteered to fight for freedom abroad.

If one believes that the military has a role to play in Iraq and can help to bring about

stability and, eventually, success then one will benefit from understanding an assessment of the risks, stakes and sacrifices in comparative perspective. Even those who opposed the decision to go to war in 2003 realize that we are now at an important crossroads. The analysis presented here cannot solve the policy questions or change the minds of those who are firmly set against the present course of the administration. But it can offer some texture and perspective to a heated and potentially destructive domestic debate, and it can offer words to those of us who routinely interact with the families of those who are deployed in harm's way.

During my one year tour in Iraq, my battalion suffered 12 combat deaths. Each death was a tremendous tragedy, especially for the families that were left behind: the widows and fatherless children; the moms, dads, brothers and sisters who lost a loved one. However, without exception, every Marine and sailor killed in my unit was a volunteer. These great Americans knew there was a war ongoing and they knew that they would go to war; and yet they willingly volunteered. Not one member of my battalion ever expressed any doubt to me about our reason for being in Iraq. The 24 hour news reporting of the 2,000 wartime combat deaths I mentioned earlier appeared to lack perspective and meaning. So, at the urging of the spouses, I asked myself the basic question, "What does it mean that 2,000 service members have died?" This essay takes an in-depth look at that question I first tried to answer in late 2005.

The Ultimate Sacrifice: Loss of Life on Our Nation's Battlefields

The killed in action rates in Iraq and Afghanistan are remarkably low from a historical perspective. As of 21 March 2007 the total Americans killed in combat in Iraq stood at 2,601: for an average of 1.8 deaths per day during four years in Iraq.¹ Even more startling are our remarkably low combat losses in Afghanistan: 197 combat deaths in five and a half years, averaging out to 0.1 deaths per day.²

Comparatively, the loss of life in Iraq is low when compared to other conflicts that this nation has been involved in. In fact, of the conflicts I studied, Iraq's combat losses are eight times smaller than those in Vietnam, and 117 times smaller than those in World War II.

Conflict	Combat Deaths	Average Per Day	Total Days Counted
World War II	291,557	211	1,348
Civil War	214,938	148	1,450
World War I	53,402	91	584
Korea	33,746	30	1,128
Vietnam	47,358	15	3,098
Iraq*	2,601	1.8	1,463
Afghanistan*	197	0.1	1,987
*As of 21 March 2007. These figures are obviously still open ended.			

Table 1, Average Daily Combat Deaths³

World War II stands as America's costliest war in terms of lives lost on the field of battle. Nearly 292,000 service members died as a direct result of our war (in both the European and Pacific theaters) fought between the attacks on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 to Victory over Japan (VJ) day, August 15, 1945.⁴ Roughly 3 years, 8 months long, the battle death toll for the war averages out to 211 deaths per day. In the first 24 hours of the allied invasion of Europe, on June 6, 1944, the United States sustained 1,465 casualties.⁵ One of the iconic scenes of World War II is Joe Rosenthal's picture, now a national monument in Washington, DC, of the Marines raising the American flag on Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima. From February 19, to March 27, 1945, Marines and sailors valiantly fought to seize the island. But they paid a steep price: over a 36 day period 6,503 Marines and sailors paid the ultimate sacrifice on this tiny island in the Pacific; an average of 180 deaths per day.⁶ This battle justly earned national acclaim and of which Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz famously declared, "Among the men who fought on Iwo Jima, uncommon valor was a common virtue." World War II was costly indeed, but the stakes were very high. In general, most Americans believed the war was a worthy effort, and that the world is a better place for defeating Adolf Hitler, Nazi Germany, Japan, and the Axis partners. Additionally, most Americans believe that the price was worth the gain.

The U.S. Civil War also saw very high casualties. Fought from April 1861 to April 1865, this four year all-out war ended up with nearly 215,000 American battle deaths, an average of 148 deaths per day.⁷ Unfortunately, the Civil War has the dubious distinction of hosting America's bloodiest day in fighting: on Sept 17, 1862, at Antietam, 3,650 Americans were killed in 24 hours.⁸ During this difficult period in history our nation demonstrated a tremendous capacity for sacrifice, as both sides believed the political stakes were high. The Union wanted to retain the cohesion of the nation. The Confederacy believed that its way of life – its culture

and existence – was being threatened. Thus, both sides had high casualty tolerance.

In both World War II and the Civil War our nation sacrificed, principally because our nation had the will to sacrifice. In these past conflicts, our nation understood that the stakes were high. In both wars the populace believed their way of life was threatened and that led to an extraordinary tolerance for casualties. To sustain public support for the fight in Iraq, the Administration needs to make the case that the stakes Iraq are high enough to warrant the level of loss that we are experiencing. This turns on the idea that U.S. national security is directly linked to regional security in the Middle East, and the containment of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Daily Deaths at Home

While most Americans seem to be acutely aware of daily deaths in Iraq, they are surprisingly unaware of loss of life occurring everyday inside the national borders. Perhaps because these losses are outside the national consciousness, they are tolerated by a nation that is increasingly intolerant of combat deaths in Iraq – deaths that are suffered by those who have willingly taken on a dangerous task and are working to combat terror and reduce regional instability in a volatile part of the world.

In speaking to spouses and loved ones of those deployed, I have found it helpful to bring to the surface some statistics that seem to wholly escape the attention of American citizens. Awareness of these statistics helps put the issue of loss into overall perspective. These statistics may not change the views of those who are opposed to the war in Iraq, but they do serve to inform the debate among those who support U.S. efforts in Iraq or those who have uncertain feelings about these issues.

Surprisingly, Americans display a tolerance for preventable, tragic loss of life here within the country. We do face loss of life, on a scale far exceeding our deaths in Iraq, daily. Alcohol related crashes kill 47 Americans per day; on average, one American is lost every 31 minutes. In the four year span encompassing the years 2002 to 2005, 68,203 Americans have been killed in alcohol related crashes in America.⁹ And, while 70 percent of those who died were legally inebriated, the rest – a full 30 percent – were simply victims of drunk drivers. That translates into 14 innocent deaths per day, 5,146 per year: and a full 7.7 times more deaths per day than in Operation Iraqi Freedom. But these deaths seem to be “off the radar screen” for most Americans. They draw little attention, little media coverage, and only minimal prevention efforts and funding.

The domestic murder rate is also higher than the loss rate for Operation Iraqi Freedom. In the year 2004 alone the homicide total for Los Angeles (county and city), New York City,

Chicago, and Detroit added up to 2091, more than three times more than Operation Iraqi Freedom for the same period. This is an average of 5.7 deaths per day.¹⁰ New York City has the highest number of homicides in the nation. The murder rate there is similar to the battle deaths in Iraq. In the four year period inclusive of 2001 to 2004, New York City's homicide total was 2,468; this represents an average of 1.7 per day, and is terribly close to Iraq's four year killed in action toll of 2,601.¹¹

It is estimated that 1,100 college students commit suicide each year.¹² Based on these numbers, more parents per year lose a son or daughter at colleges than in Iraq. Children simply walking to or from home, on their way to school or other activities, are killed in accidents at the rate of 1.6 per day. Safe Kids, an advocacy group for children, reports that in 2004, 599 kids age 5-14 were killed by simply walking on the streets of America.¹³ The table below summarizes the findings above.

Activity	Time Period/Killed	Average Per Day
Drunk Driving Total	4 years/68,203	47
Drunk Driving Innocents	4 years/20,460	14
Homicides in LA, NY City, Chicago and Detroit in 2004	1 year/2,091	5.7
College Suicides	1 year/1,100	3
Iraq Combat Deaths	4 years/2,601	1.8
Homicides, NY City	4 years/2,468	1.7
Child Pedestrians in 2004	1 year/599	1.6

Table 2, Comparisons of Death Rates

The overall casualty rate in Iraq is very close to the annual U.S. death rate for child pedestrian accidents. Historically, this rate is quite low compared to other wars the U.S. has fought.

The National Treasure: The Costs of Operation Iraqi Freedom

Much is being made of the cost of the war in Iraq; again however, little in the way of comparison is offered for the layperson. The following data puts the cost of war in historical and contemporary perspective. Looking back since 1940, we have many examples of increased defense spending. In World War II, Korea, and Vietnam we can examine and evaluate spending levels for each of those conflicts and compare them with defense spending in Iraq. All dollar amounts used are adjusted for inflation with the year 2000 as the base year.

In the four years inclusive of 1942-45, the cost of the WWII National Defense budget was \$2,226 billion dollars. For the four years from 2002-2005, the cost of the Global War On Terror (GWOT) National Defense budget, to include Afghanistan and Iraq, was \$1,560 billion dollars; this total amount includes all supplemental bills used to pay for the costs of Iraq and Afghanistan. In the years 1986-89, often called the Reagan buildup, this nation contributed \$1,565 billion to the National Defense budget.¹⁴ Surprisingly, these years saw higher defense outlays than we have seen during the opening years of the GWOT. These Cold War years add up to just over \$6 billion dollars more than the first four full years on the Global War on Terror. Our highest four year defense budgets in Vietnam and Korea come in behind our current effort in Iraq.

Cause	Four Year Period	Adjusted to Year 2000 (billions)
WWII	1942-1945	\$2226
Reagan Buildup	1986-1989	\$1565
Iraq/Afghanistan	2002-2005	\$1560
Vietnam	1967-1970	\$1283
Korea	1951-1954	\$970

Table 3, Four Year Defense Budgets

From the perspective above, this four year period has been relatively costly, although not disproportionately so compared with other U.S. wars. Measuring against the Gross Domestic Product provides a different perspective. From 2002 to 2005 our defense budget has averaged 3.7% of the Gross Domestic Product.¹⁵ Going back to 1940 only eight years out of 65 cost this nation proportionally less than our defense budgets that encompass the costs of Iraq and Afghanistan. The only less expensive years are 1940 (1.7% of GDP), 1948 (3.5% of GDP), and six years during the Clinton Administration from 1996 to 2001 when the defense budget averaged 3.2% of GDP. The 65 year historical average of defense spending as compared to the GDP is 8.15%.¹⁶ These numbers indicate that the nation is capable of funding the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts if it chooses to do so.

Fortunately, resources are now available to drill down and specifically analyze the costs in Iraq, since that is the focus of the essay. The Global War on Terror overall, and our efforts in Afghanistan, specifically, are supported by the public. Our efforts in Iraq are more troublesome. The actual cost of the war in Iraq is estimated to reach \$378 billion dollars in March, 2007.¹⁷ Since the war started, in March 2003, an even four year timeframe, calculations as to the national treasure put forth in this effort average out to \$94.5 billion dollars per year. A large sum

by almost any definition, but more reasonable if examined from a different angle.

With an estimated national population of 300 million people in America, the \$378 billion dollars averages out to a bill of \$1,260 dollars to every living American.¹⁸ This is the four year cost of the war, so the average cost per year, per American, is \$315 dollars apiece. If we were in fact paying this as we go and not incurring national debt, the straight-line math puts the cost of the war in Iraq at 83 cents per day, per American.¹⁹ If there were no progressive tax system, the to-date costs assigned to Operation Iraqi Freedom for every American would be about the price of a store bought cup of coffee per day.

But, there is a progressive tax system, so actual cost to most taxpayers is considerably reduced. According to The Tax Foundation, in the year 2004 the top 25% of wage earners in America paid 85% of the income tax collected by the federal government.²⁰ Therefore, using these figures, the bottom 75% of income tax payers would roughly owe \$190 for the total four year cost of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Amortized out over the four year period, the cost adds up to thirteen cents per day: about the price of a home brewed cup of coffee per day.

There are still other ways to look at these costs. Assuming that income tax would be used to pay off Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the top 25% of wage earners would pay 85% of the cost, their total bill would be \$1,071. Amortized out over four years, that would come out to \$2.93 per day: about the cost of a Starbuck's latte per day. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, most of the people in this group will, on average, daily spend: \$10 for household furnishings and equipment, \$10 for apparel, \$12 for entertainment, \$7 per day for gas, and \$13 dollars for food away from home.²¹

If Americans view terrorism as a national priority, it follows that they would view it as a national budgetary priority. President Reagan believed that the United States needed to increase its spending at a crucial period in the Cold War; President Bush believes that he must increase spending at a crucial period in the Global War on Terrorism. If Americans believe that their dollars devoted to the Global War on Terrorism will help keep them safe and will preserve their way of life, then they will be willing to accept a bearable burden, as they have in the past. But the White House must reassess and restructure the strategic communications effort to provide perspective and to reinforce the connection between American security at home and regional stability/security in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The New Greatest Generation: The All-Volunteer Force at War

In Iraq, the Marines and sailors I commanded knew the potential cost of their service; they voluntarily served, reenlisted at high rates, and even extended their tours of duty to remain in

Iraq. They willingly sacrificed because they believed in the cause and the benefits of continuing the U.S. effort in Iraq. They recognized that America has much at stake in the Middle East. To them, the words, “with liberty and justice for all” were more than a simple recitation; they believed those words. They believed that freedom and prosperity could take root if it was planted carefully and tended well.

The all volunteer force should serve as a barometer for our efforts in Iraq. Conventional wisdom would postulate that if the men and women on the ground in Iraq were disillusioned with our efforts there, then they would vote with their feet and not re-enlist. Further, they would probably discourage others from enlisting in the first place. Surprisingly, that is not happening. By all measures, the all volunteer force that the Department of Defense is fielding is a remarkable success, and should serve as an indicator that Iraq is not an unpopular war with those who serve on the ground.

From the public debate one gets the impression that the services are manning the all volunteer force with poor, uneducated, inner city minorities who possess few other opportunities. The outcome of this conventional wisdom has been a call to reinstate the draft in order to distribute the burden of war more evenly among all Americans. This thought process led Rep. Charles Rangel to sponsor and bring to the floor for a vote, on October 5, 2004, House Resolution 163, a bill that would require re-establishment of a draft.²²

The public assumption that the contemporary all-volunteer force is comprised mainly of those who are economically disadvantaged is simply incorrect. In fact, in 2005 our nations poorest families are the most under-represented quintile of the five, based on median family incomes. The following chart provides enlistees split into the national median family income levels.²³

Income level	Percent of U.S. Population (18-24 year olds)	2005 Recruits
\$29,375 and below	20	13.7
\$29,382 to \$35,462	20	19.2
\$35,463 to \$41,685	20	21.5
\$41,688 to \$52,068	20	22.8
\$52,071 to 200,001	20	22.8

Table 4, Household Income of Military Recruits, 2003-2005²⁴

This chart debunks the myth that the poor are over-represented in our armed forces. Quite the contrary, they are under represented. The poorest 40% of 18-24 year olds only represent 33% of our force, whereas the wealthiest 40% of 18-24 year olds provide 46% of our

recruits.

Education, or lack thereof, does not appear to be a factor in the military's ability to recruit and retain high quality forces in a time of war. Of the national pool of potential military recruits, 80% possess a general equivalency degree or higher. But, among those who actually joined the service between 2003 and 2005, fully 97% possessed this level of education.²⁵ My experience as a battalion commander in Iraq reinforces these statistics; I found my Marines and sailors to be bright, articulate, and adaptive in all situations they faced.

Population density of the neighborhood that one lives in does play a part in who volunteers to serve in the armed forces. Contrary to statements made by public officials, inner city youth do not enlist more often than any other cohort; they too are also under-represented in the military. As the chart below details, urban youth are not joining the military in disproportionately high numbers.

Population Density	U.S. Population of 18-24 year olds	2003-2005 Recruits
Urban	39%	28%
Urban-Suburban	24%	25%
Suburban	20%	23%
Suburban-Rural	16%	24%

Table 5, Recruits by Population Density, 2003-2005²⁶

Minority over-representation in the military has also served as clarion call for those who believe that the all volunteer wartime force is disproportionately made up of people of color. The general theme of the argument is that the policy to fight in Iraq is made by white men, while the lion's share of the fighting is done by minorities.

Race	Percent U.S. Population, 2004	Percent Military Recruits, 2005
White	75.6%	73.1%
Hispanic	14.2%	13.9%
African American/Black	12.2%	13%
Asian	4.2%	2.9%

Table 6, Recruits by Race²⁷

As is noted above, African-Americans are slightly over-represented in the military relative to the total U.S. population. However, none of the percentages cited above are inordinately out of proportion; they represent a military that is demographically very similar to the population of America.

Calls for a draft are often based on false assumptions. Today's military is ethnically

diverse: it represents a cross section of America, not a narrow slice composed of the urban underclass. By and large, the recruits in today's military are middle-class, educated, suburban and racially balanced. In a time of war the all-volunteer military force appears to be a tremendous success.

The previous discussion debunks some myths about the elements of our society that volunteer for the military services. But any discussion of recruiting and manpower must also consider the questions of numbers more generally. The services require not only quality recruits, but also a sufficient number of recruits. The component of quantity is tremendously important, especially in terms of getting the forces required to deploy to a region while keeping a strategic reserve for defense of the homeland and other regional contingencies.

The all-volunteer force is often referred to as the "all recruited force" by those within the services whose job it is to sign up young men and women to serve. The mission of recruiting during a war, and an unpopular one at that, is extremely difficult. In 2007, the U.S. enjoys incredible wealth and correspondingly bright job prospects for young Americans. Understanding the principal obstacles facing recruiters will shed some light on the tremendous challenge they face in fulfilling their mission of manning the "all recruited force." The major forces working against recruiters are: the size of the primary pool of enlistees, the U.S. unemployment rate, and the college enrollment rate.

The primary pool of eligible enlistees, males age 17-24 years old, is not as large for recruiting as it first appears. Of the available population, 55% will be disqualified for medical, moral reasons (juvenile delinquency or illegal drug use), or mental reasons. An additional 16% will require a waiver for the above reasons that may or may not be granted. What we end up with is a pool of only 29% that are potentially fully qualified for military service. This pool shrinks further, however, after initial testing is completed. The military recruiters find that only 12% are eventually categorized as "fully qualified" with appropriate scores on military entrance exams and a high school diploma.²⁸ This is the primary pool that recruiters will work from. In 2006, of the roughly 15.4 million U.S. male population age 17-24, only 1.9 million fell into the fully qualified category.²⁹

Competition for qualified recruits within the pool is fierce. With the national average unemployment rate at 5.4% for the years 2002 to 2006, the military has had to compete in a robust job market for the recent high school graduate.³⁰ Additionally, most of these prospective recruits look to further their education by attending college. In 2005, nearly 69% of all high school graduates were enrolled in a college or university.³¹ These two facts alone place tremendous pressure on recruiters to fill the force with quality recruits. Fortunately, they are

succeeding.

In the fiscal year 2006, ending on September 30, 2006, all four services reported that they met or exceeded their recruiting goals.³² The actual numbers are reported here:

	Accessions	Goal	Percent
Army	80,635	80,000	101
Marines	32,337	32,301	100
Navy	36,679	36,656	100
Air Force	30,889	30,750	100

Table 7, FY 2006 Recruiting by Service³³

Looking further into the numbers, this is a remarkable achievement. As stated earlier, the services must contend with a seemingly unpopular war, high operations tempo, a vibrant job market, and the attractiveness of a college education. Based on end strength authorizations, the services needed to recruit 179,707 new enlistees into national military service; they exceeded that goal by 833. Accomplishing this mission is no easy task.

First and foremost, recruiting is a demanding job. From the Marine Corps perspective, we view recruiting with mystical admiration. While there is a discernable science behind recruiting, it also requires tremendous salesmanship. Marines who have not served on recruiting duty hold in high esteem those who successfully complete a tour of recruiting. But, it is more than simple salesmanship that enables a recruiter to sign-up a young adult for a stint in the wartime services; the service's utilize an effective advertising campaign in order to attract volunteers.

All of the services have directed their advertising campaigns towards, "bolstering patriotic impulses and the perception of military service."³⁴ A quick look at the campaigns show messages that are widely attractive to today's youth: service, strength, adventure, and being a part of something important. This, coupled with the positive outlook of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, has helped the services achieve their recruiting missions. From what I have observed, there still exists a strong undercurrent of national pride and patriotism in this nation. I see it in the Marines and sailors I have served with, and I see it, also, in the non-military youth I speak to. These factors, along with attractive pay and benefits packages, serve to aid the military in recruiting the right quantity and quality of volunteers.

Recruiting is just one factor in manning the force; an equally important factor is retention. Building a professional force requires retaining the best and the brightest of the force. A high operational tempo military, with multiple combat deployments spanning a single four year enlistment, creates a challenging environment for retention. If we add into this mix an unpopular war, we might assume that the likely result would be failure. Fortunately, the opposite is true.

The Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, Army Reserve and Army National Guard all met their retention goals for fiscal year 2006.³⁵ The Navy did not meet their stated goals, but they attribute the lower numbers to a purposeful reshaping of the force and an increase in physical fitness standards for sailors.³⁶

	Reenlistments	Goal	Percent
Army	67,410	64,200	105
Army Reserve	18,243	17,712	103
Army National Guard ³⁷	41,152	34,875	118
Marines ³⁸	12,152	12,139	100

Table 8, FY 2006 Retention by Ground Combat Forces

The table above specifically highlights ground combat forces. Every one of the 132,694 reenlistments represents a soldier or Marine who knows full well what it means to serve: the sacrifices, the hardships, and the personal toll exacted by an organization at war. Most have served in combat operations on foreign soil, far from home. More than any other barometer of the success of the all volunteer force, retention in the ranks should be the leading indicator as to how well the services are treating their forces, and how the forces feel about the contribution they are making to national security.

Against all odds, the all volunteer force is succeeding in all regards: recruitment, reenlistment, and representative demographics. While it is true that the services are putting a lot of attention and money into these efforts, in the end, money alone does not and cannot ensure success in manning a wartime all volunteer force. The basic mission of the force has to be taken into account when a man or woman decides to reenlist. The Marines and sailors I have served with believe in the mission in Iraq. When I returned from Iraq, I met my reenlistment goals; nearly every Marine had served in Iraq twice. I suspect that the soldiers who are reenlisting also believe in what they are doing.

The present-day generation of soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are the new “greatest generation.” They willingly enlist, serve, and re-enlist, knowing that the nation is at war and that they will more than likely serve in a combat zone. They know the price of service. They can put the death toll into perspective; they realize that the 24 hour news organizations must report something, and that bad news sells better than good news. But, they also know that they are living in a combat zone. They see Iraqis trying to live normal lives. They believe that democracy can be exported and regional stability can be brought to the Middle East; they are working long hours under adverse conditions to make manifest that belief.

Keeping the costs of the war in perspective is important. The national discussion based

on Iraq is filled with misconceptions about the armed services and about what is truly happening on the ground. As of this writing, the national discussion centers around the thought that Congress can withdraw House Joint Resolution 114 (the joint resolution authorizing the use of United States Armed Forces against Iraq). To truly have an informed discussion on Iraq, we must be able to put the costs of the war into perspective, and remove the emotional misconceptions. To do any less is a disservice to those who have the faith and courage to respond to the nation's call to duty. Instead of a discussion on how we can gracefully exit, we must work towards the stability and security that is essential to the region and to long term U.S. national security. Too many have already sacrificed too much towards a successful outcome; to allow their sacrifice to go unrewarded would be absolutely tragic.

Endnotes

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