

# Starting a draft would end the war

SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

**JOAN VENNOCHI**

Reinstate the military draft and see how quickly the United States ends its war in Iraq.

Imagine if all our sons and daughters were at risk for deployment to the desert. Imagine if all our children faced the al-Qaida-style butchery that took the lives of two American soldiers, Pfc. Thomas L. Tucker of Madras, Ore., and Pfc. Kristian Menchaca of Houston.

If we feared our children were next up to be gutted like fish, we might be less likely to shake our heads at crazy antiwar activist Cindy Sheehan. If turning 18 meant your kid's boots on the ground, a resolution to pull troops out of Iraq by a certain date might grab more than six votes in the U.S. Senate.

A key difference between Iraq and Vietnam is the country's ability to keep this war at a convenient distance. We can turn from the front-page headlines of war, death and destruction to sports and celebrity gossip; a click of the remote, and the face of a young soldier, now dead, fades to "Friends" reruns or "America's Next Top Model." The volunteer army ensures that someone else's children are losing limbs and dying; someone else's children are pushed to alleged acts of violence against Iraqi detainees and civilians. Even when the news from Iraq is so brutal it forces a momentary focus on war, quick relief is promised.

Last Tuesday, Larry King interviewed relatives of the Houston soldier whose body was dumped by insurgents after they tortured and killed him. During commercial breaks, CNN ceaselessly promoted Anderson

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Cooper's upcoming interview with actress Angelina Jolie. Stay with us, the network begged. Don't worry, be happy; don't dwell on the gruesome, the inane is soon to follow.

This country is so easily diverted. People are angrier at illegal immigrants than what should really enrage them — involvement in a war we can't end or win, depending on whose version of reality you rely upon.

President Bush mobilizes his bubble to move from Washington to Baghdad for a few hours, and the country is supposed to salute his bravery? Bravery is manning a traffic checkpoint in a hostile town named Youssifiyah, where Spc. David J. Babineau of Springfield was killed and Tucker and Menchaca were abducted.

Senators have been debating whether to begin pulling troops from Iraq. Democrats, fearful about wearing the "cut and run" label, are divided over setting a fixed date for complete withdrawal. Sen. John Kerry, once an Iraq war supporter, is now championing a timetable. He may be following the polls, but at least he is forcing a needed showdown. How about championing a draft? That would really get the American people's attention.

Last February, Rep. Charles Rangel, a Democrat from New York, did so, introducing the Universal National Service Act of

2006. It requires all people in the United States, including women, between the ages of 18 and 42, to perform a period of military service or period of civilian service in furtherance of the national defense and homeland security. The proposal was referred to the House Subcommittee on Military Personnel.

At the time, Rangel said he did not expect the bill to pass; he intended it as a reminder of those who have died and suffered injuries and will continue to do so in Iraq. A news release posted on Rangel's Web site noted, "Right now, the only people being asked to sacrifice in any way are those men and women who, with limited options, chose military service and now find themselves in harm's way in Iraq. A draft would ensure that every economic group would have to do their share and not allow some to stay behind while other people's children do the fighting."

The country has not had a military draft since 1973, when the United States converted to an all-volunteer military. The registration requirement was suspended in 1975, but resumed again in 1980 under President Carter in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

During the Vietnam conflict, the draft sent hundreds of thousands of protesters to the streets. When war is not an abstraction but a personal, involuntary destination, the blanket rationale of war — defending liberty — receives tougher scrutiny. Then, politicians have to answer to every American family, not only to those whose loved ones volunteered for military service.

Either this war is worth every citizen's effort, or it's not worth any soldier's life.

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Joan Vennoch writes for The Boston Globe.