



Sacrifice, that pesky idea

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The Sunday *New York Times* had an interesting article called [All Quiet on the Home Front, and Some Soldiers Are Asking Why](#). The second paragraph of the article raises the question:

From bases in Iraq and across the United States to the Pentagon and the military's war colleges, officers and enlisted personnel quietly raise a question for political leaders: if America is truly on a war footing, why is so little sacrifice asked of the nation at large?

The article goes on to discuss how the "nation at war" of 2005 bears no resemblance to the behavior of either the government or the citizenry during World War II.* Americans are not being asked to sacrifice in any way, except to perhaps send a care package or two to the troops to ostensibly boost morale. There is no serious talk of a draft (though the liberal blogosphere seems to have its suspicions), and in fact, Americans are even being explicitly told to continue living life as normal to "not to give terrorists a moral victory by giving in to the fear of violence."

*I'll leave it as an exercise to the reader to determine how the national psyche during the Vietnam War fits into this debate.

This is psychologically damaging to the troops. According to the article, soldiers are sensing that the regular citizen's level of commitment to this war is pretty weak. Says David C. Hendrickson of Colorado College,

"Bush understands that the support of the public for war - especially the war in Iraq - is conditioned on demanding little of the public."

...

"The public wants very much to support the troops" in Iraq, he said. "But it doesn't really believe in the mission. Most consider it a war of choice, and a majority - although a thin one - thinks it was the wrong choice."

Now, I find the sentiment expressed in this article this article sort of peculiar. I can understand why the troops would like a greater show of commitment by the country, since the feeling that the *military* is at war but the *country* isn't is certainly demoralizing. But what I don't understand is what the soldiers would have us do. The pictures that accompany the NYT article reflect the effort that people made with victory gardens and gas rationing during WWII, but wouldn't that kind of effort today be just as symbolic as the care packages? There aren't really shortages of anything right now. One possibility that the article points out is that we could raise taxes to pay off the deficit caused by this war, but certainly the citizenry isn't going to accept that.

I bring this up on The Oil Drum because I think it reflects a salient aspect of the American psyche that's going to cause us great difficulty in a Peak Oil world. It seems to me that many Americans of the 21st century feel a great sense of entitlement. I am not immune to it myself; for example, I believe that our services should run flawlessly, and when a subway stops for 5 minutes in a tunnel or the airplane sits on the tarmac for a while I get indignant. Every American reading this can picture the angered, agitated, high-pitched voice of the customer who believes he'll miss his connection. Considering how minor these things are, imagine what will happen if and when gas is once again rationed, and certain foods are in short supply because we can't grow as much of it as we used to. Will there be riots? We're seemingly at the limits of the rich/poor divide--but could it possibly get worse? I'm going to take the high road. Perhaps once the reality of the situation is crystal clear to everyone, we'll have a massive shift in our collective behavior, and we'll begin to understand why it isn't our God-given right--or even a part of the American Dream--to want for nothing.

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