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## Symposium examines whether Americans pay attention to Iraq

Kimberly Hefling  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**CARLISLE, Pa.** — What are the implications if a nation goes to war and its people barely pay attention?

Roughly 150 military leaders, policy analysts and academics gathered at the Army War College on Wednesday to address that question, with the U.S. beginning its fourth year of a conflict that has killed more than 2,300 American troops.

A main concern, analysts say, is that Americans may lose patience with the fight against terrorism in Iraq and elsewhere, and ultimately decide that the fight is costing too much in money and lives.

Despite the two fronts in Iraq and Afghanistan, President Bush has not asked for personal sacrifices on the scale of those made in World War II, when Americans bought war bonds and rationed sugar and other goods.

Also, because the U.S. has an all-volunteer military, fewer people have a personal connection to a service member than was the case, for example, during the Vietnam War, when many soldiers were drafted.

"It's extremely important then to ensure that the population itself both recognizes the necessity of

the action, but is also willing to accept and bear some of the burden," said Army Lt. Col. Nathan Freier, director of national security affairs at the college's Strategic Studies Institute.

Opposition to the war in Iraq has been more subdued than it was during the Vietnam War. Attendance at demonstrations last month marking the third year anniversary of the Iraq war was far short of the millions who protested the 2003 invasion and the first anniversary in 2004.

The public's interest in Iraq has dipped since the 2003 invasion, when close to six in 10 were closely following news about the war. Polling early this year found 40 percent paying very close attention to the situation in Iraq — less than the 47 percent that closely followed the mining disaster in West Virginia. And far more people were closely following news about high gas prices in October and November of last year, according to the Pew Research Center.

Bush has said a future U.S. president and a future Iraqi government will decide when all troops leave Iraq — indication that the fight could last years longer.

Just 35 percent of the public approves of the way Bush has handled the war — his lowest approval rating on that issue in AP-

Ipsos polling.

Army Col. Pete Mansoor, who commanded troops in Iraq, said it is difficult for the administration to call for deep sacrifices.

"Before you ask for shared sacrifice, there has to be consensus of shared goals and objectives, and if you look at any opinion poll, the nation is deeply divided over what the war on terror means, and how to prosecute," Mansoor said.

James Carafano, a research fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation think tank, said he believes Americans have sacrificed by sending troops to war and paying taxes. The amount of resources devoted to the fight should be in proportion to what is needed, Carafano said.

"The notion that somehow a nation is only at war if everyone is growing a victory garden is silly," said Carafano, co-author of the book "Winning the Long War."

In a long war such as the current effort against terrorism, Carafano said, "you are as concerned about maintaining the productive capacity of the state as you are about getting the terrorists, defeating the enemy. That means you have to give equal weight to ensuring the state is healthy and competitive over the long term."

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