

Our national defense — it's not worth dignifying?

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"I'd rather see this country overrun than see my kids go to war."

So said a woman I've known since childhood. Someone I thought I knew well. After the initial shock of her words I am still baffled, almost a year later, as to how an American can reach such a point of apathy about national defense.

While her statement probably stems from maternal instinct regarding her two children (who are small), I worry this may be a common, though unspoken, sentiment of many Americans.

Do others have the "not my kid" mentality? Is individual security more valued than freedom for all? Are people teaching their children the defense of this nation is something beneath consideration?

Maybe I am out of step — a patriotic anachronism. Perhaps my attachment to the military culture and community is reflected in my attitude and belief

system. As a child, my values were initially instilled by my parents, both veterans. Yet my friend's father is a veteran, too. It's distressing if this man's contribution to protecting the country went unnoticed in his own home.

If I could turn back the clock to the moment of her frightening statement, this is what I would have told my friend:

Your complacency about national defense is a dangerous habit.

Of all the things you lie awake worrying about, I'll bet your sleep has never been interrupted by the fear rebels will pound down your door and drag you, your husband or your children out of your home.

Likewise, I'd wager you've never had a nightmare where the "Stars and Stripes" was replaced by some unknown flag of a strange regime.

You, my friend, can raise your two children in a time where fear of invasion only happens to people in distant countries. As your little

ones lie dreaming, there are sons and daughters of America stationed all over the world who keep your youngsters safe.

Airmen, sailors, soldiers and Marines are prepared to die to defend your liberties and your front door. Because they have volunteered to be vigilant, it allows many Americans to be blissfully unaware of the dangerous place the world can be.

While you may slumber, others have not. In this country's history, there have been countless mothers and wives who spent sleepless nights wondering what happened to their child or husband who never returned from war. In their heartbreak and loneliness, perhaps they found some measure of comfort and pride knowing their loved one disappeared or died so others could come home. This country remains free as a result of veterans' sacrifices.

I imagine those women's faces as you say, "I'd rather see this country overrun than see my kids go to war."

Remember, the children you hold so dear are also America's children. As part of this nation, they are probably some of the best protected and most privileged children on the planet.

That privilege comes with a price tag. For all of our faults, societal ills and past mistakes, the United States is still our chosen home. Or is there somewhere else you would rather live? If forced to leave, where would you go?

Not long ago, I watched as a father patiently read and

explained to his two young sons the Gettysburg Address etched in stone at Lincoln's monument in D.C. I wonder if the words made an impression.

Did the boys grasp the meaning? Did they appreciate the sacrifice? Did they understand this nation's freedom has a cost, perhaps of their own lives someday?

Hopefully, this father will be successful in his lessons on liberty.

For America's future, I hope his two children come to understand patriotism, loyalty and the courage to defend. Because for those two children who grow up to understand, I worry there may be two who do not.

... But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate — we cannot consecrate — we cannot hallow — this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

- President Abraham Lincoln
Gettysburg Address, Nov. 19, 1863