Madonna has withdrawn an antiwar video that was to promote her new single, "American Life." It had been scheduled to have its premiere on Friday on the cable channel VH1, but on Monday night she decided not to release it.

Madonna has marketed herself through controversy in the past. But at a time when an onstage remark against President Bush by Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks has led to a widespread radio boycott of the group, Madonna had second thoughts about the video.

"I have decided not to release my new video," she said in a statement. "It was filmed before the war started, and I do not believe it is appropriate to air it at this time. Due to the volatile state of the world and out of sensitivity and respect to the armed forces, who I support and pray for, I do not want to risk offending anyone who might misinterpret the meaning of this video."

There was plenty of room for interpretation. The song "American Life" is about dissatisfaction with stardom, but the video, filmed in early February, was full of military and battlefield imagery.

In the version dated March 25, Madonna wore a form-fitting, quasi-military uniform, complete with dog tags. It featured a fashion show of skimpy clothing in
snow or skimpy clothing in camouflage patterns, with one model wearing a thong and a gas mask and another a camouflage chador against a video backdrop of war planes. In the next sequence Madonna and dancers defaced a women's restroom, carving "Protect Me" into a wall. Close-ups showed Madonna singing with fiery explosions in the background.

The clip then returned to the fashion show, intercut with pictures of bombardments. Madonna crashed a car through the backdrop onto the stage, hitting a model, and fired a water cannon at fashion photographers. This was intercut with scenes of artillery fire and bombing. In the final sequence Madonna tossed a grenade into the fashion-show audience, and it was caught by a George W. Bush look-alike, who flipped open its top to reveal it as a cigarette lighter and lighted a cigar with it.

In an MTV News interview last Friday, she said the hand-grenade scene was "really important."

"The one who catches it," she said, "takes something that could be violent and destructive and takes the destruction out of it by turning it into something else."

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