



## Democrats' silence on the global jihad

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The surge is underway, and more rapidly than many of us were expecting. The influx of new troops into Iraq? No, of [candidates into the 2008 presidential contest](#).

So far this month, Senators [Hillary Clinton](#) of New York, [Barack Obama](#) of Illinois, and [Chris Dodd](#) of Connecticut, plus Governor [Bill Richardson](#) of New Mexico -- Democrats all -- have formally launched White House campaigns (or "exploratory committees"). Already in the race were former senators [John Edwards](#) of North Carolina and [Mike Gravel](#) of Alaska, former governor [Tom Vilsack](#) of Iowa, and Ohio Congressman [Dennis Kucinich](#).

Eight Democrats, eight would-be commanders-in-chief -- all running for president in a time of war. So

which of them, on getting into the race, had this to say about the nature of the enemy confronting us?

"We are engaged in a war against an axis of Islamists, extremists, and terrorists. It is an axis of evil. It has headquarters in Tehran and Waziristan. But because of the unconventional nature of this war, it also has headquarters in cities throughout Europe and Asia and Africa and the United States of America, in cells that operate in the shadows but are prepared to strike us again as they did on September 11th, 2001.

"The enemy we are fighting is . . . totalitarian. It is inhumane. It has a violent ideology and a goal of expansionism and totalitarianism. It threatens our security, our values, our way of life as seriously, in my

opinion, as fascism and communism did in the last century."

Can't match that assessment of the global jihad with the Democratic candidate who uttered it? Don't feel bad; it was a trick question. Those words were actually spoken by Senator Joseph Lieberman at an American Enterprise Institute [forum on Iraq](#) this month. Lieberman shared the podium with GOP colleague John McCain, who was no less blunt in his evaluation of the war and its stakes.

For McCain, a Republican presidential hopeful, the struggle against the Islamists is the paramount issue of the day. His [campaign website](#), while spare, highlights [a recent speech](#) in which McCain called stopping radical Islam "our most important moral obligation." He described the jihadists as "moral monsters but . . . also a disciplined, dedicated movement driven by an apocalyptic religious zeal, which celebrates martyrdom and murder." We are in a battle with "those who would shackle humanity, especially women, in a feudal theocracy," McCain said. "We cannot afford to take a holiday from history."

Sounding nearly as resolute is former governor [Mitt Romney](#), whose campaign website puts "[Defeating the Jihadists](#)" first in its list of key campaign issues. "The jihadists are waging a global war against the United States and its allies," Romney is quoted as saying, "with the ambition of replacing legitimate governments with a caliphate -- a theocracy." [Speaking in Israel yes-](#)

[terday](#), Romney asserted that "a central purpose of NATO should be to defeat radical Islam," through means both military and ideological.

The Democratic candidates, by contrast, are virtually silent on the subject.

Barack Obama launched his exploratory committee with an [online video](#) that mentioned the economy, healthcare, vanishing pensions, college costs, and the fractiousness of partisan politics. His only nod to national security was a passing reference to the war in Iraq, which he opposes. But 9/11 and its aftermath? The worldwide jihad? The global conflict between democratic freedom and Taliban-style repression? Not a word.

Hillary Clinton's highly praised [kickoff video](#) likewise included nothing about the overriding threat of our time. Her website does contain a [speech](#) she gave at the Council on Foreign Relations last October, but it is filled with windy rhetoric about diplomacy and international conferences and how we must address the "troubled conditions terrorists seek out." New Yorkers don't need to be told "that we are in a war against terrorists who seek to do us harm," Clinton says. But if she recognizes that the future of the civilized world depends on winning that war, she shows little sign of it.

What is true of Obama and Clinton is more or less true of Edwards, Richardson, and the others. The Democrats seem prepared to emulate John Kerry, who [insisted in 2004](#)

that "we have to get back to the place we were" before 9/11. Back, that is, to treating Islamist terrorism not as "the focus of our lives," but merely as "a nuisance" that we need "to reduce" -- like gambling, he said, or prostitution.

Heading into the 2008 campaign, our political universe is still divided. On one side are those who see the Islamists as a nuisance to be controlled. On the other: those who regard them as an existential enemy to be destroyed. On the relative strength of those two camps, the next election may well depend.