



## The smell of irresolution

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Here's a puzzle: Why would Al Qaeda choose the past several days, just as Democrats in Congress were voting to run up a white flag and commit the United States to defeat in Iraq, to launch a bloody wave of terrorist atrocities?

For weeks, there had been [noticeably less bloodshed](#) and chaos in Iraq's most dangerous areas. The number of [civilians murdered in Baghdad](#), for example, had dropped from 1,222 in December to 954 in January to 494 in February. US military deaths had dropped 20 percent during the first month of General David Petraeus's new counterinsurgency strategy (the so-called "surge"), while the number of suspected terrorists captured had soared tenfold.

Nevertheless, the Democratic leadership in the House and Senate chose to move ahead with legislation requiring the United States to withdraw its troops from Iraq. Of course a US withdrawal is precisely [what Al Qaeda wants](#) -- Osama bin Laden has [crowed](#) that "the failure of the United States . . . in Iraq will mean defeat in all their wars." Wouldn't it have made more sense, then, for the terrorists to continue lying low, keeping the violence down and doing nothing that might queer the American retreat?

What could Al Qaeda have hoped to gain by shattering this relative lull with [last week's horrific attacks](#)? The [carnage](#) included a suicide bombing in a Baghdad market that killed at least 60 people, mostly women and children, and a triple car-bomb massacre in Diyala prov-

ince that left 28 civilians dead. But why now? With Washington's top Democrats embracing the surrender agenda -- Senate majority leader [Harry Reid](#) declared on Tuesday that "this war is not worth the spilling of another drop of American blood" -- why would the terrorists unleash a renewed wave of slaughter and mayhem?

For that matter, why would Iran have chosen this moment to seize 15 British sailors and marines? One of the hostages, Leading Seaman Faye Turney, was forced to write [a letter](#) urging the British government "to start withdrawing our forces from Iraq and let them determine their own future." But Britain *has* been withdrawing its forces from Iraq, reducing troop levels from 40,000 in 2003 to just 7,100 as of February. Prime Minister Tony Blair recently announced that [1,600 more troops will be pulled out this spring](#). So what was the point of Iran's unprovoked ambush?

The answer in both cases is that this is how totalitarian aggressors react to faintheartedness.

"In Middle Eastern warfare," [writes retired US Army Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Peters](#) in the New York Post, "a classic tactic has been to retreat in the face of strength, but to attack when your enemy withdraws or shows signs of weakness." British troop pullouts and congressional cut-and-run votes prompt not fewer outrages and less mayhem, but more. The smell of irresolution doesn't satiate the totalitarians' appetite; it makes it keener.

Six years after Sept. 11, and so many people still refuse to absorb this fundamental fact of life. The United States [reacted with diffidence](#) to the kidnapping of its citizens and the bombing of its embassies, so the jihadists attacked the Pentagon and destroyed the Twin Towers. Israel abandoned Gaza to the Palestinians, and the Palestinians turned turned Gaza into a launching pad for increased terror. The new Democratic leadership trumpets its eagerness to leave the Iraqi people to the mercy of barbarians? The barbarians pocket their gains and go on killing.

Bernard Lewis, the renowned scholar of Islam and the Middle East, and a man old enough to recall the rise of Adolf Hitler, was recently quoted as saying that too many political leaders today exemplify "the spirit of Munich -- a refusal to acknowledge the danger we face and a belief that through accommodation we can avoid conflict." He added, sadly: "I look around and I see [more Chamberlains than Churchills](#)."

But that is unfair to the British prime minister whose name is a synonym for 1930s-era appeasement. Once Neville Chamberlain realized that Hitler was unappeasable, he declared war on Nazi Germany. Today every member of Congress knows exactly what radical Islamists are capable of. Some who voted last week for a fixed deadline to withdraw US troops from Iraq had previously warned that any such deadline would be disastrous. [Senator Hillary Clinton](#), for example, said in 2005: "I don't believe it's smart to set a date for withdrawal. I don't think

you should *ever* telegraph your intentions to the enemy so they can await you."

The enemy hasn't changed since 2005. Nor have the stakes in this

war, nor the courage and commitment of the American troops fighting it. What has changed is control of Congress, and the air is heavy with the smell of irresolution.