



## What drives the Democrats?

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Legislation passed by congressional Democrats last week would force US troops to abandon Iraq beginning Oct. 1. Though a presidential veto was foreordained, the vote was great news for the jihadis in Iraq, their second such morale boost in a week. On April 19, Senate majority leader Harry Reid had [run up a white flag](#), declaring that "this war is lost and the surge is not accomplishing anything" -- music to the ears of al-Qaeda and its allies.

Why is the Democratic Party so wedded to defeat in Iraq? What drives its determination to see this war end in American failure?

The most generous explanation is that Democrats genuinely believe that Iraq will be better off with the Americans gone -- that removing US

troops will eliminate the catalyst of al-Qaeda's butchery.

But as [Connecticut's Joseph Lieberman](#) pointed out in the Senate on Thursday, this is sheer fantasy. US troops have retreated from Iraqi cities and regions a number of times, yet "in each of these places where US forces pulled back, al-Qaeda rushed in. Rather than becoming islands of peace, they became . . . islands of fear and violence."

Lieberman quoted the grim forecast of [Sheik Abdul Sattar](#), a Sunni tribal leader in Anbar province: "If the American forces leave right now, there will be civil war and the area will fall into total chaos." The most recent National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq agrees. An American withdrawal in the near future "almost certainly would lead to a sig-

nificant increase in the scale and scope of sectarian conflict in Iraq," it concludes. "Massive civilian casualties and forced population displacement would be probable."

Some Democrats, clearly, are motivated by ideological conviction. There may be some on the party's leftmost fringe who would welcome a US defeat on the grounds that the only good superpower is a humbled superpower. There are certainly Democrats in Congress, such as Ted Kennedy and Dennis Kucinich, who almost always oppose any use of military force on principle.

And then there are those who cannot bring themselves to acknowledge the magnitude of the stakes in Iraq or in the larger conflict against radical jihadism. The reality of this struggle -- that we are in an existential war with a totalitarian enemy that seeks worldwide dominance, celebrates death, and cannot be appeased -- is too bleak and hopeless. They would rather escape into an alternate reality, one in which Americans can choose to end the war by quitting the battlefield.

But in the end there is no escaping that for many Democrats, this is all about politics. Both President Bush and the war in Iraq are unpopular, and the Democratic leadership hopes to capitalize by opposing both of them.

["We are going to pick up Senate seats as a result of this war,"](#) Reid said candidly at an April 12 press conference. "Senator Schumer has shown me numbers that are compel-

ling and astounding." To which Schumer, chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, added: "The war in Iraq is a lead weight attached to their ankle. . . . They are looking extinction in the eye." He spoke those words, [Congressional Quarterly observed](#), "making no attempt to hide his glee."

That glee is very telling. It would be one thing for lawmakers to conclude regretfully that America's campaign in Iraq has failed and that bringing the troops home is the least bad option left. Were that the case, voting to pull the plug would be a sad and painful duty, one no member of Congress would carry out with "glee."

Yet when the House of Representatives voted last month to force a withdrawal from Iraq, Democrats were jubilant.

"Many House Democrats stayed on the floor, reveling in their victory," [reported The Hill](#) on March 23. "House Appropriations Committee Chairman Dave Obey and Representative John Murtha hugged each other while a smiling [majority leader Steny] Hoyer shook every hand he could find. . . . [majority whip James] Clyburn joked with members as [Speaker Nancy] Pelosi kissed and hugged her colleagues."

The New York Times noted that in conversations with "dozens" of Democrats, [Pelosi's argument for the bill](#) was overtly political: "Did they want a headline saying, 'Congress is standing up to President Bush,' or

'Congress gives President Bush free rein?'"

[Senator John McCain](#), adamantly supporting the current "surge" in Iraq, says he would rather lose a

presidential campaign than a war. Democrats, all smiles, prefer to lose the war and win the campaign. They're not alone. In Iraq, Al Qaeda is smiling, too.