We must fight
Linda Chavez (archive)

October 29, 2003

It's a good thing the current crop of Democratic candidates weren't running for president in 1944. Instead of defeating Hitler and Tojo, we might have ended up with an "exit strategy" that saved American lives in the short run but cost us our freedom and way of life. Indeed, the Democrats' disgraceful performances to date suggest that most of the candidates would like to cut and run from Iraq, no matter what the consequences. Unfortunately, they've managed to convince a majority of their fellow party members that this is the right thing to do.

According to the latest Gallup Poll on the issue, 70 percent of Democrats want a full or partial withdrawal of troops from Iraq. Back in April, 54 percent of Democrats fully supported the war. Now, only 24 percent of Democrats -- but 88 percent of Republicans -- say they still support the war. This kind of partisan polarization is dangerous, especially when America faces perhaps the gravest threat in our nation's history.

Iraq is not Vietnam, no matter how much Howard Dean, John Kerry, Al Sharpton, and the other Democratic presidential wannabes would like to pretend it is. As despicable as Ho Chi Minh was, he did not pose a direct threat to the United States. The Vietnam War was part of the larger struggle against communism. The ultimate adversary was the Soviet Union. Despite our withdrawal from Vietnam, we won the larger war, vanquishing communism and defeating the Soviet Union without firing a direct shot. History proved we could afford to lose Vietnam no matter how ignoble or humiliating it was. However, we cannot afford to lose Iraq.

In the post 9-11 world, Saddam Hussein's Iraq posed a direct threat to the United States. We know that Saddam had chemical and biological weapons -- he used them to kill and maim hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, Kurds and Iranians, and never produced proof that he had destroyed the weapons after the 1991 war. We know that Saddam had nuclear ambitions, which he would most certainly have realized had the Israelis not taken out his nuclear reactor some 20 years ago.

The fact that we have not unearthed a cache of weapons of mass destruction as yet does not prove they never existed or that Saddam wouldn't try to rebuild an arsenal of such weapons if the opportunity arose.

Can any rational person believe that Saddam would not have been willing to provide those weapons to al Qaeda or some other terrorist group for the right price? And if we leave Iraq now without having rooted out the Baathists loyal to Saddam who remain, will we be safe from some future threat?

Do the Democrats not understand this? With the exception of Joe Lieberman and Dick Gephardt, all of the Democratic contenders seem willing to risk losing the war in Iraq, especially if it means one of them might win the White House. They don't want to spend the money to help rebuild Iraq. They want our troops out of Iraq, even if we haven't finished the job. What kind of message does this send to our enemies -- that Americans are willing to surrender when the going gets tough?

The problem is, we have nowhere to run. We cannot hide. Our enemies will come after us -- they already have, and they will again unless we stop them first.

"We are at war," President Bush reminded us again this week. "The terrorists will strike, and they will kill innocent life." And not only in front of a Red Cross building in Iraq, as they did on Monday, Bush warned. "They will strike and kill in America, too," he said.

What we need is not an "exit strategy" but a commitment to win this war, no matter what sacrifice it takes. The Democrats are doing all that they can to undermine that commitment, and the polls suggest they are succeeding in persuading a growing number of Americans the war is not worth winning. It's a dangerous game -- one in which all of us could end up the losers.

Linda Chavez is President of the Center for Equal Opportunity, a TownHall.com member organization.