Mr. President, I thank my distinguished colleague.

Mr. President, the Senate, a few minutes ago, acted on an amendment,

the Warner-Byrd amendment. It is a rather unique one. I first thank my

distinguished colleague and mentor in many ways, Robert C. Byrd of West

Virginia. We have collaborated together many times on pieces of

legislation.

But I approached him, and he concurred in my observations, that this

was badly needed by the Congress, by the country, and indeed by the

President and his staff, as well as the Department of Defense.

Our amendment calls for the appropriation of a sum of money to enable

a private sector entity to make an independent--independent of all

entities, the Pentagon and otherwise, in the Federal Government--

assessment of the status of the Iraqi security forces, most

specifically the army, the national guard, and other elements which are

fighting alongside the coalition forces, and primarily the U.S. forces

now in the operations in Baghdad.

I have followed this issue for a number of years, and I have referred

to the report to the Congress of May 2006, roughly a year ago. In that

report, they talk about the:

In another part, on page 46:

Now, this is a report, as I say, of a year ago. Compare that to the

report Congress received this month, March of 2007, and the following

paragraph, observation, from page 25:

``ISF'' being Iraqi Security Forces--

That is referred to by those of us who served as ``AWOL''--

So it is not nearly, in 2007, as encouraging as the report in 2006. I

felt, together with Senator Byrd and a group of cosponsors on this

amendment, it was imperative we get an independent analysis of some of

the reports of the Department of Defense and others to determine what

is the viability of this force.

Every plan we lay down and discuss here on the floor regarding Iraq--

the amendment yesterday adopted narrowly by Senator Reid, calling on

certain troop deployments and dates; the President's program of January

20 of this year, in which he revised strategy and initiated what we

commonly refer to as the surge operation in Baghdad today--every single

plan, concept for the future of Iraq is dependent upon the military

proficiency, the viability, the capability of the Iraqi security

forces. I felt very strongly that we had to go and get a second

opinion--a phrase often used in medicine, but it is just as important

here in diplomacy. It is just as important in military analysis. Let us

get a second independent opinion about these forces.

Drawing on my own modest military career but a lifetime of experience

in working with our military and having served in the Pentagon for over

5 years as Under Secretary and Secretary of the Navy, I have had some

experience with training of forces. Our great country, since World War

II, took recruits, brought them into recruit training, and in 6 to 7

months they were trained, capable individuals. They were then assigned

to other units to have additional training, but they were often ready.

Today, those same recruits in this generation of forces that we have

serving on active duty in the Army and particularly the National Guard,

they are trained in a period of 6 to 8 to 9

months, and then they go into combat situations. We have been training

these 325,000 people, most of them, for a period of 2\1/2\ years. We

need to know at what point this heavy investment of American taxpayers'

dollars, the work of the U.S. military to train these individuals, at

what point are we able to say: This force is able to take on these

operations and perform them because all our planning is dependent on

that.

I find it most difficult to see how we have trained 325,000--that is

over twice the number of U.S. forces in Iraq--we have trained them for

these many years. Why are they not able to step up and take on the

major operations now being performed by the U.S. forces? Our President

has indicated we will continue to embed our forces with Iraqi units and

continue to give them certain supplies and logistics and equipment. It

seems to me the fighting, the brunt of the fighting ought to be borne

by the Iraqi forces, and we, the United States, be it the Congress or

the executive branch--but most importantly the people--are entitled to

have an assessment of what we have created with the expenditure of

these hundreds upon hundreds upon hundreds of millions of dollars to

train these forces.

Now, the concept is--and I will be working with the administration

and hopefully this becomes law and work through the process of

appropriations--this sum of money would go to a private, independent

entity to engage individuals to make this report, and then the report

comes back to the Congress of the United States.

I thank my colleagues who have supported me, particularly my

distinguished, longtime friend and associate from West Virginia,

Senator Robert C. Byrd. We have done our work to initiate this all-

important study because every plan we have is dependent upon a better

understanding and knowledge of what has or has not been created in

terms of the Iraqi security forces.

Mr. President, it seems to me we have to face the reality

of fact. Now, this would be an independent report. Obviously, I think

the Department of Defense would come back and provide some rebuttal or

some additional information, so we would have to take all the

viewpoints and put them together. But what I say to my distinguished

colleague from Illinois is we are still relying solely upon these

reports that come on an annual basis. I read through them, and I

encourage others to do so. It is very difficult to glean from these

reports that sound, basic fact: Are they trained? Are they equipped?

Are they ready? Most importantly, I say to the Senator, do they have

the commitment in their hearts to take orders and fight on behalf of

the Iraqi people? That is what concerns me because of the large amount

of AWOL, absentees, and all the other types of things that are

reflected in this report.