Mr. President, today Senator Warner and I have introduced

an important and potentially landmark bipartisan resolution. My good

friend and colleague from Virginia has correctly highlighted what is

one of the most critical issues before us as we debate our continued

occupation of Iraq: the capacity of the Iraqi Government to take

responsibility for the security of its own country. The President said

in November 2005 that ``as the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down.''

But are the Iraqis standing up? If, in the President's formulation, our

continued military occupation of Iraq is dependent on the readiness of

the Iraqi security forces, is it not crucial that we know what kind of

progress those Iraqi forces are making? The Warner-Byrd resolution will

hopefully provide the Congress with the unvarnished truth about this

issue, instead of more of the same rhetoric and obfuscation doled out

to the Congress since the war began. Under Warner-Byrd, within 120 days

of passage of this Act, a designated independent private sector entity

will report to Congress on the readiness of the ISF to assume

responsibility for maintaining the territorial integrity of Iraq,

denying terrorists a safe haven, and bringing an end to sectarian

violence. The report will also address whether continued support by

U.S. troops is likely to contribute to the ISF's readiness to take on

those missions in the coming months.

We have had 4 years now of rosy reports coming from the Pentagon and

the White House about the steady progress being made in Iraq, but

events on the ground regularly belie those sunny assessments. Our

soldiers have been training and equipping Iraqi troops and police

for several years, and the White House continues to tout the ``real

progress'' made by the Iraqi security forces. However, an article in

the February 5 edition of the New York Times noted that the Iraqi units

arriving in Baghdad are showing up at 55 to 60 percent of their full

strength. Even more problematic, the Iraqi police force is itself seen

by many in Iraq as simply an extension of the sectarian militias,

terrorizing the population with rape, extortion, and murder.

Considering the record to date of the Iraqi troops, will any amount

of training produce a reliable and capable national army? If this is

what we are waiting for--if we are truly planning to ``stand down''

once the ISF ``stands up''--I, for one, want to know when we can expect

that to happen. And if it is not going to happen, we should know that

as well. How long will we continue to spend American lives and treasure

training Iraqi troops that can't be counted on? Six months? A year?

Five years? If this is an ultimately hopeless endeavor, we should find

out now, and change our strategy accordingly.

The situation in Iraq has devolved into a full-blown civil war, as

sects which have been battling for centuries continue to attack each

other--and us--in an ever-widening bloodbath. In the words of the

President's own National Intelligence Estimate, the term `` `civil war'

accurately describes key elements of the Iraqi conflict,'' which has

become a ``self-sustaining inter-sectarian struggle between Shia and

Sunnis.'' U.S. troops have no constructive role to play in fighting

another country's civil war. Increasingly in Iraq, there is no clearly

defined ``enemy'' for our soldiers to engage, only various indigenous

groups that hate us almost as much as they hate each other. The

President's plan calls for the Iraqi troops to assume responsibility

for halting this death spiral, but the NIE again casts doubt on this

strategy. It states that ``the Iraqi security forces--particularly the

Iraqi police--will be hard-pressed in the next 12-18 months to execute

significantly increased security responsibilities.''

I suspect that further training is not really the answer. We can

train a soldier how to fire a weapon; we can give him communications

equipment; we can teach him how to conduct a raid or defend a post. But

we cannot give him a sense of national identity. We cannot provide him

with allegiance to government and country that transcends ethnic or

sectarian hatreds. The bottom line is that the violence in Iraq

requires a political solution. Everyone--everyone--now acknowledges

that. Only when the Iraqi people, through their government, are able to

overcome the sectarian divisions that are splitting the country apart,

will stability and peace be achieved. U.S. Central Command Commander

Gen. John Abizaid said it himself in testimony before Congress on

November 15, 2006: ``I believe that more American forces prevent the

Iraqis from doing more, from taking more responsibility for their own

future.''

The Warner-Byrd resolution seeks to address that issue head-on, with

an unbiased, nonpartisan report on the likelihood that continued U.S.

involvement will contribute to the capacity for the Iraqis to take

responsibility for their own future. This report will provide us with a

clear-eyed view of what is going on in Iraq, and whether the

President's plan has any realistic hope of success.