Mr. President, Senator Nelson of Nebraska and Senator

Collins and I have worked for some time to put forward a resolution

embracing the very serious, heartfelt sentiments of Senators with

regard to the President's plan that he enunciated on January 10.

That plan--and I credit the President for the in-depth study and

preparation that went into it, the consultations; I was privileged to

be a part of three consultations with the President in that period--it

is that plan about which a number of us here in the Senate have some

thoughts.

The President, in his statement on January 10, laid down the

invitation for Members of Congress to come forward and provide their

thoughts. And that is the vein in which the three of us, together with

a series of cosponsors, have adopted this first draft, which is

identical to the draft we put into the Record some nights ago. We

purposely have not changed a comma or a period or any other word in it

because a number of colleagues, in a very thoughtful and proper way,

have come to us with suggestions and ideas. But at this time, we

believe we should lay this down, such that other Senators who might

wish to be cosponsors may do so. The Senate works its will each day,

and we are always here to consider ideas from other colleagues, but at

the present time this is the format. We purposely waited until after

the Foreign Relations Committee worked on its resolution, which I

understand will soon be working its way to the calendar.

So for that purpose, we put in ours. We find some differences--very

significant, in my judgment--between ours and the resolution offered by

the distinguished Senator, Mr. Biden, and others--Senator Levin,

indeed, Senator Hagel.

We believe we have put a greater emphasis on urging the President to

consider other options, given that we have a general disagreement with

the very

significant level of troops that are specifically set forth in the

President's plan.

We also feel very strongly about the issue of sectarian violence and

how that must be the primary mission of the Iraqi forces. The American

GI simply should not be, in my judgment--whenever possible, the rules

of engagement should provide that the Iraqi forces should deal with the

sectarian violence issue. They understand the language. They understand

the cultural differences, which precipitate the animosity between the

Sunni and the Shia and, indeed, the most distressing aspects of it: the

Shia upon Shia and Sunni upon Sunni. We recognize that sectarian

violence is undermining, in many ways--the level of it--the efforts of

this Government under Prime Minister Maliki to go forward and exercise

the full reins of sovereignty and that it is in those interests that

sectarian violence has to be dealt with. It is an important mission,

but I believe strongly it is a mission that should be given primarily

to the Iraqi forces.

We concur with the President, who said many times, including in his

statement on January 10, that to allow this Government to fail and to

allow the accomplishments toward sovereignty through free elections by

the Iraqi people to be lost and this country to simply be plunged into

chaotic situations is not in the interests of peace in that region and,

indeed, peace in the world.

Our resolution does not provide for a reduction in any way or suggest

the level of U.S. forces there now. It does not provide a timetable. It

simply urges the President to consider all options and sets forth in

there the primary missions as we interpret them to be in the interests

of our country. Those primary missions track in large measure the

Baker-Hamilton report.

We also stress the need for benchmarks to be spelled out with

clarity. And should the operations in Baghdad go forward under the

Commander in Chief--and we recognize fully and in no way try to

contravene the authority of the President to act under the Constitution

as Commander in Chief--should that go forward, it will be done in an

incremental fashion, as we have been told by the Chairman of the Joint

Chiefs and others.

So when the first operation takes place, we should carefully set

forth the benchmarks and see if the Iraqi Government and the Iraqi

armed forces fulfill those benchmarks; namely, do they all come in the

numbers that they were supposed to under that plan? They failed to do

that when a similar augmentation for the Baghdad operation was

initiated this summer. Will the political structure in Iraq resist,

refrain, and in every other way allow the military commanders, both

U.S. and Iraqi, to carry out the missions as they see fit and employ

such tactics as they deem necessary to achieve those missions without

being called by the Government and told: Stop this, withdraw here, or

do not take that prisoner, but if you have him, then release him. We

cannot go in under that guise.

Thirdly and most importantly, we have to see how the Iraqis perform.

Will they take the point? Will they take the lead? And in such tactics,

will they then be the primary--the primary--if not the essential force

that deals with sectarian violence, such that the rules of engagement

spell out: Whenever necessary, the coalition forces and namely the

United States shall not be utilized.

At this time, I would invite my colleagues to express their views,

and I will ask each to name those cosponsors whom we have gotten from

each side of the aisle.

I yield the floor.

Did not the CENTCOM commander, who is still the CENTCOM

commander, General Abizaid, testify before our committee and, in the

precise words, said he felt that at this time added troops were not

necessary, more troops would lessen the incentive of the Iraqis to pick

up the burdens which we are trying to have them assume under

sovereignty?

I thank my colleagues, the Senator from Nebraska and

Senator Collins. It is important that we have taken this initiative

because a number of colleagues--10 now--wish to be recognized. But

believe me, there are 10 more and 10 more who will soon come forward,

hopefully, and support this resolution. I also want to stress, as both

of my colleagues did, I hope as this debate progresses, it will not be

a question of who is the most patriotic, who is the strongest supporter

of the American troops. I pride myself with having had a relationship

with the Armed Forces of the United States, modest though it may be,

since late 1944-1945. I had the privilege of working and learning. I

often feel the Armed Forces did far more for me than I have done for

them. In my years, now 29 years, here in the Senate on the Armed

Services Committee, I have done everything I could to repay the Armed

Forces for what they did for this humble person, to provide for them in

a way that meets the sincerity of their commitments and that of their

families.

So it is not a question of who is the most patriotic or a question of

who is trying to be confrontational with the President. These are

heartfelt, closely held views we have about one of the most serious

episodes in contemporary American history. I think the President has

shown a measure of courage in this matter. But as has been

acknowledged, we have made mistakes. And what we have tried to do is

conscientiously say how we feel about the immediate future.

I asked for a change in strategy, I guess it was October, when I came

back and said the situation, as I saw it, in Iraq was going sideways.

That has been done. This is a change in strategy. I acknowledge that.

We were invited by the President to make suggestions. We have done that

in a courteous, respectful manner. I thank my colleagues.

I stress also the need for bipartisanship. I am not certain anyone

can predict how this debate will go and what the outcome will be or how

many resolutions come forward. I think it should be a healthy, strong

debate and one in which the American public, which is

very much attuned to this situation and has strong views of its own--

and we should respect those views--I hope that what debate and actions

follow, whatever they may be by this Chamber on such final resolutions

that may be voted on, earn the respect and the trust and the confidence

not only of the Armed Forces but of the American public. Because we can

only be successful in this operation to save the Government of Iraq,

whether it is this one or a successor one, to save the people of Iraq

so they can exercise sovereignty if there is strong public support and

a strong and accurate bipartisan level of participation by the Congress

of the United States. To have a vote all on one side and a vote all on

the other side will not help this very situation at this time.

So one of the main goals--and we have achieved it--is bipartisanship,

truly.

I thank my colleagues. I yield the floor. And I wish to, in so

yielding, thank the distinguished Senator from Colorado for joining us

in this matter.

Mr. President, I wish to thank our colleague from

Colorado and pick up on the theme that he closed and talked on

earlier--unity.

Yes, there is great unity among the American people and a depth of

concern about the loss of our forces and the wounding and suffering of

the families. We have not lost our resolve. Our President has been

firm. But this institution, the great Congress of the United States, a

coequal branch of the Government, now must rise and show our commitment

to fulfill the wishes and hopes and prayers of the American people, and

do so in a bipartisan manner. That is the very heart of the effort of

our 10 colleagues who thus far have come forward and put their names

into the public domain as supporting the provisions of this resolution.

They do resemble, in many respects, the provisions in the Biden-

Levin-Hagel resolution. When that first came out, so much of the

rhetoric surrounding that resolution was disturbing to many people.

That gave rise to the efforts that we have put forth, culminating in

placing this document into the Record tonight.

I hope others will consider joining us because it is important to

show unity and bipartisanship in the Congress in saying that we, in

fact, understand the hopes, wishes, and prayers of the American people

and the Armed Forces of the United States.

I thank my colleague and yield the floor.