Mr. President, I first thank the Presiding Officer for

addressing the Senate earlier this evening with regard to the proposed

resolution which you and our distinguished colleague from Maine,

Senator Collins, have been working on now for several days and

throughout the weekend, placing it into the Record for all Senators to

have an opportunity to study it.

I ask unanimous consent that it be printed in the Record following my

statement.

Mr. President, as I said when I was joined by you and

Senator Collins in our brief press conference this afternoon, the

resolution we currently anticipate will not be filed formally at the

desk until the State of the Union is completed tomorrow and the Senate

Foreign Relations Committee works its will on a resolution which is

pending before it, authored by the chairman, Senator Biden, and Senator

Hagel of Nebraska and other Senators who have joined in that

resolution. As that resolution works its way through the Foreign

Relations Committee, we, the three of us who have worked on this

resolution, will take an examination of what is sent to the floor for

purposes of floor consideration, and at that time I anticipate we could

indicate to the Senate a desire that our resolution be considered as a

substitute resolution and therefore an alternative to the resolution

that will be reported out from the Foreign Relations Committee.

That is what we stated today, and it is my intention to continue to

work along in that vein because my motivation solely is to do what is

in the best interests of the United States of America, and most

particularly the men and women of the Armed Forces at this very pivotal

time in the history of our Nation's commitment to Iraq, considering the

President's plan.

As I said earlier, America's contribution to try to bring about a

settlement of so many of the controversies in the Middle East is done

in the spirit only of trying to bring peace and freedom to that very

troubled region. Iraq, at this moment, is very much before the Congress

because the President has, on the 10th of this month, laid down a plan.

I say it is very much before us at this time, but also there are the

very serious questions relating to Iran and their desire to go ahead

and develop certain aspects of nuclear energy which could at some point

in time undertake a program that would lead to the development of

nuclear weapons. That is a very serious question. The question of

Lebanon is before this body, as is the question of the relationship

between Israel and the Palestinian people. So what we do in the context

of Iraq is not isolated from all of these serious problems.

But for the moment, we have before us the plan laid down by the

President on the 10th of this month. We go back and we trace the

evolution of this problem from, say, early last fall when clearly, in

the minds of many of us, the situation was not measuring up to our

expectations. Our strategy at that time was not bringing about clear

benchmarks with positive results.

We had an extraordinary chapter of history when our military

campaign, together with our coalition partners, enabled the Iraqi

people to have free and open elections, to elect a government, and for

that government to take office. They were enabled to begin the

fundamental steps to create, No. 1, a sovereign nation with the full

exercise of sovereignty in the hands of the government and the Iraqi

people, and No. 2, an improved security situation in Iraq which would

reflect throughout the region.

Those were all very positive accomplishments. It is owing to the

commitment of the nations forming the coalition of forces--to some

extent the United Nations and the Security Council, so many

institutions and commitments, and the bravery of the men and women of

the Armed Forces--that they brought about a nation now that is a

sovereign nation, Iraq, whose government was elected by a free people.

But the security situation has deteriorated, and it deteriorated in

the fall to the point that I and others began to express our concern

publicly. Senator Levin and I returned from a trip to that region--

specifically Iraq--and in the context of reporting back to this body,

the Senate, I indicated that, in my judgment, the situation was

drifting sideways. We were simply not seeing the improvements in

security. The reins of sovereignty which we put into the hands of the

Iraqi people and their elected government were not bringing about the

results we wished.

The level of attacks was quite significant, and a measure of total

distrust was beginning to evolve between the various factions--the

Sunnis distrusting the Shias, the Shias distrusting the Sunnis--and

this has led to where the sectarian violence is now the predominant

problem, bringing back instability into Iraq.

Following comments by leaders of our administration, leaders here in

the Congress and, indeed, very respected experts in the private sector,

the President--and I commend him--instituted a total analysis of the

situation. I had specifically said, when I mentioned it was drifting

sideways, that we ought to consider all aspects of changing this

strategy we were currently employing at that time. I am not suggesting

my remarks were the motivation, but the President took the initiative

and the leadership, and he is to be commended. Every entity within the

Federal system, from the Departments of State and Defense to all other

entities, made contributions to what should be done to change his

strategy.

The Joint Chiefs did a very significant study on their own

initiative, and I commend Chairman Pace. I think the Baker-Hamilton

commission did a remarkably fine study and of value, certainly, in my

judgment, to this institution and all those who are concentrating on

how to resolve the problems in Iraq.

So the President's plan presumably was his analysis of all of this

extraordinary input into a change of strategy, and he laid down his

proposal. At the same time he addressed the country, he said--and I

would like to quote him. He said very clearly that ``he would welcome

and encourage others to make contributions.''

So what we did by way of putting this together was not to contravene

in any way the constitutional authorities of our President which are

expressed, his role as Commander in Chief, but to accept the offer to

the Congress and others made by the President on January 10, 2007, and

I quote:

Now, I commend the President for that, and it is in that vein that

the three of us came together and began our concentrated effort shortly

after January 10, and this is the work product.

It is clear to us that the U.S. strategy and operations in Iraq can

only be sustained and achieved with the support of the American people

and with a level of bipartisanship in the Congress. On that note,

indulge me to reflect a little bit on the Vietnam era where I was

privileged to serve as Under Secretary, Secretary of the Navy for 5

years and some months during that extraordinary chapter of American

history. I can say unequivocally that my heart goes out to the men and

women in the Armed Forces in that chapter of our history. There was a

great deal of public misunderstanding about their role and what they

were trying to do individually and collectively in the cause of

freedom.

Eventually, that public opinion began to infuse itself here in the

two bodies of the Congress, and the rest is history. The Congress began

to pull back and, as I say, the rest is history.

I do not suggest there is a parallel between the combat situations,

although there was enormous suffering and a tremendous level of

casualties--over 50,000 men and women killed, wounded and missing in

Vietnam--a great sacrifice for our country in the cause of freedom. But

today I see an absolute magnificent response all across this Nation

among the American citizens to that brave individual in uniform, both

men and women. And the same for our many dedicated civilians who are

also taking risks in connection with carrying out the instructions our

President has laid down for the military, as well as all branches of

this Government, to achieve our goals in Iraq.

Our group agreed with the President that a loss, a failed state in

Iraq will affect peace in the region and indeed possibly peace

elsewhere in the world. The stakes are very high, and we weighed that

always, as the three of us prepared these documents. But that is why I

say during the Vietnam chapter the support of the American people and a

level of bipartisanship in this institution were essential, and that is

the purpose of this resolution: to hopefully achieve that.

The purpose of this resolution is not to cut our forces at their

present level, nor to institute and force a timetable for withdrawal.

That is a matter--those are both matters that have to be left to the

President--but, rather, to express the genuine concerns of a number of

Senators from both parties about the President's plan and to set forth

a strategy.

Unlike some of the other resolutions that have been before the body,

we detail a change in strategy which offers to the President the

possibility of modification of his plan. We do not mean to be

confrontational with our President but instead to provide a sense of

bipartisan resolve on recommendations, alternatives, modifications, we

should say, to the plan that he laid down. Our thoughts were in many

respects guided by the Baker-Hamilton report.

As I say, I personally, and I think the Presiding Officer and others,

attach a great deal of significance to that report.

Now, the primary objective we see of our strategy in Iraq should be

the following: First, to encourage Iraqi leaders to make political

compromises that

will foster reconciliation and strengthen the unity of government,

ultimately leading to improvements in the security situation. Further,

our resolution states the military part of this strategy should focus

on the following. Now, let me address the military part. I think the

President very wisely--and this reflects on the strength of his

proposal. It is really three parts. It is diplomacy. It is economic

support in the nature of reconstruction, a greater emphasis on helping

the civilian infrastructure, whether it be their electricity, their

sanitation, their water, or many things that are very much lacking,

regrettably. Irrespective of the enormity of the contributions we have

made thus far to improve those situations, they just haven't improved.

So this plan of the President's is really three parts, but I address

now the military part. But I caution that a chain is no stronger than

its weakest link. All three of these vital parts of the President's

program, in order to have any measure of success, have to work

together. Our committee, the Armed Services Committee on which the

Presiding Officer, Senator Collins and I serve, a year or so ago put in

specific legislation to encourage the Secretaries of the Cabinet

positions here, the Cabinet Secretaries and the administrators of our

Government--we put into law giving them flexibility to encourage more

of their people to get into the mainstream to support the economic and

reconstruction parts of the President's program. That part has to be

every bit as strong as whatever the final military components will be,

and the same with the diplomacy.

But our military strategies should focus on the following: First,

maintaining the territorial integrity of Iraq; second, denying

international terrorists a safe haven, conducting counterterrorism

operations, promoting regional stability, and training and equipping

Iraqi forces to take full responsibility for their own security.

Further, our resolution states that the U.S. military operations

should, as much as possible, be confined to these goals and charges the

Iraqi military with the primary mission of combating sectarian

violence. That has been a matter of intense interest for this

particular Senator, and I drew up this paragraph accordingly, with the

Presiding Officer's help and concurrence.

That is, I said, charges--it says to the Iraqi military: We have

invested in this military, over years and years, of training, 2 full

years, plus--equipment. Now, this sectarian violence is something that

you should be out on the point to handle. That is your primary

responsibility. The coalition GI, be it American or British or the

others, should not be cast into situations--whenever possible, trying

not to let them be cast into situations--or firefights, to be more

precise--where Sunni is shooting at Shia, or vice versa, and for them

to try and make the decisions of how to solve that. That, to me, we

should charge the Iraqis as their responsibility, with their armed

forces which we have trained, and which number over 200,000 because

they understand the language, they understand the culture, and they

understand the complexity of this deep-rooted distrust, this hatred

which propels the Sunni versus the Shia, or the Shia versus the Sunni.

This results in these wanton killings, the horrible tortures every

day. The bodies are in the streets. I will not describe how those

bodies have been desecrated as a symbol of this hatred and distrust.

That is not for us to solve. That is for the Iraqis to solve.

As such, our resolution states that the Senate disagrees with the

President's plan to augment our forces by 21,500 and urges the

President instead to consider all options and alternatives for

achieving the strategic goals outlined above. Take a look at 21,500.

That sends a difficult signal, a tough signal. We have discussed Anbar

Province, the province where the Marines are fighting. There we

recognize that an augmentation of forces is necessary; namely, because

we are engaged directly with al-Qaida.

I say respectfully to the President, we urge him to consider other

options, to use a lesser number of troops. Particularly, we have had

briefings recently about the growing sentiment among the Iraqi people,

the rank and file, that they do not want more troops on their soil.

They are anxious to have them leave now. Leaving precipitously could

topple that situation into an all-out civil war, an imploding which has

disastrous consequences, as we all know.

Again, the signal we are sending 21,500 is, in our judgment, not a

wise strategy. We are looking at Baghdad, which is the central focus of

sectarian violence, the central focus of the majority of the

insecurity, the failure of security in that sovereign country. There

are nine different districts, as I understand the President's plan.

Sequentially, we will take a district, go into it, and see whether we

can lower the level of violence, provide some stability and confidence

for their people so they can look forward to some quality of life and

personal safety. However, as we take the initial section of Baghdad and

do that, we should lay down clear and precise benchmarks that the Iraqi

forces must follow.

First, the commitment of their troop level, together with the troop

level of the United States, should be all present and accounted for on

the day before that operation starts. Unlike the failure of the

previous surge efforts in Baghdad, where the United States showed up

and a far less number of Iraqis--although committed--showed up. That is

the first thing.

The second thing is, it is imperative the political leadership in

that Government, which has tried to reach down and make decisions

affecting the tactics of the Armed Forces--both Iraqi Armed Forces and

the coalition forces, principally the American forces--that comes to an

absolute end. The military commanders should be entrusted to make the

tactical decisions, to take the missions they see fit for each of the

nine districts--the missions can be different in the nine districts--

and carry them out halfway through, after perhaps sacrificing life and

limb to accomplish some measure of success, will not be reversed by a

political decision made somewhere in the Iraqi Government. That is

important.

We had the benchmarks. Before we go to a second location in Baghdad,

we will have, hopefully, a clearly documented case of this operation

going according to plan. It will document the Iraqis taking the point,

as we say in military work, with regard to incidents of sectarian

violence. Before we go to another sequenced operation in Baghdad, we

better be sure. Words will not do it. Statements will not do it. Only

deeds will be convincing that there is a full and unqualified

commitment to the Iraqi Government.

Our resolution is worthy of consideration by our colleagues. There is

a great deal of concern in the Senate and adversity of opinion. I

respect that. I hope it will be considered. The three of us will be

glad to work with colleagues individually, collectively, and most

respectfully of our own leadership, as to what guidance they might wish

to give us.

I thank the Presiding Officer. I thank Senator Collins. I wish to

thank staff who worked throughout the weekend and over the past few

days: Tim Becker, from the staff of the Presiding Officer; Christiana

Gallagher, also of your staff; Jane Alonso, of Senator Collins' staff;

John Ullyot, of my staff; Bill Caniano and Ann Loomis and Sandy Luff,

of my staff. We have had quite a team working. They all made possible

the completion of this resolution today.