Mr. President, I would like to make a few brief comments

this morning on the Warner resolution and the negotiations that went on

yesterday, led by Senator Levin, to deal with Iraq.

Three weeks ago before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,

Secretary Rice presented the President's plan for Iraq. The Presiding

Officer, among others, was there. Its main feature was to send more

American troops into Baghdad, in the middle of a sectarian war, in the

middle of a city of over 6 million people.

The reaction to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from

Republicans and Democrats alike ranged from profound skepticism to

outright opposition. That pretty much reflected the reaction across the

country.

Consequently, Senators Hagel, Levin, Snowe, and I wrote a resolution

to give Senators a way to vote their voices, vote what they had said.

We believe, the four of us, and I know the Presiding Officer does, as

well, that the quickest, most effective way to get the President to

change his course is to demonstrate to him that his policy has little

or no support in this Senate, in our committee, or, quite frankly,

across the country.

After we introduced our resolution, Senator Warner came forward with

his resolution. The bottom line of the resolution is essentially the

same, and it was: Don't send more American troops into the middle of a

civil war.

There was one critical difference between the Biden-Levin and the

Warner amendment. Senator Warner's resolution, in one paragraph, left

open, I think unintentionally, the possibility of increasing the

overall number of American troops in Iraq--just not in Baghdad. So from

our perspective it wasn't enough to say don't go into Baghdad with more

troops; we wanted to say don't raise the number of troops, as well.

The provision in the Warner amendment that allowed for that, if read

by the President the way he would want to read it, I believe, would

have allowed an increase in troops. We believe very strongly--Senator

Levin, myself, Hagel, Snowe--that would send the wrong message. We

ought to be drawing down in Iraq, not ramping up. We ought to be

redeploying, not deploying into Baghdad. We should make it clear to the

Iraqi leaders that they have to begin to make the hard compromises

necessary for a political solution.

A political solution everyone virtually agrees on is the precondition

for anything positive happening in Iraq. Now, I make it clear, I and

everyone else in this Senate knows that it is not an easy thing for the

Iraqi leadership to do, but it is absolutely essential.

So we approached Senator Warner several times to try to work out the

difference between the Biden and the Warner resolutions. I am very

pleased that last night, through the leadership of Senator Warner and

Senator Levin, we succeeded in doing just that. The language Senator

Warner removed from his resolution removed the possibility that it can

be read as calling for more troops in Iraq.

With that change, I am very pleased to join Senator Levin, now known

as the Levin-Warner resolution, as a cosponsor of that resolution. For

my intent, at the outset when I first spoke out about the President's

planned surge of American forces in Iraq, when I spoke out before the

new year, I made it clear that my purpose was to build bipartisan

opposition to his plan because that was the best way to get him to

reconsider. That is exactly what this compromise does.

Now we have a real opportunity for the Senate to speak clearly. Every

Senator will have a chance to vote on whether he or she supports or

disagrees with the President's plan to send more troops into the middle

of a civil war. If the President does not listen to the majority of the

Congress--and I expect the majority of Congress will vote for our

resolution--if he does not respond to a majority of the Congress and a

majority of the American people, we will have to look for other ways to

change his policy. But this is a very important first step.

Also, I would like to take a moment to present what I believe are the

principal findings of our 4 weeks of hearings, over 50 hours, if I am

not mistaken, of hearings in the Foreign Relations Committee. While no

unanimous prescription has emerged, there is remarkably broad consensus

on three main points: First, American troops cannot stop sectarian

warfare in Iraq, only a political settlement can do that; the second

point of consensus, we must engage in intensive regional diplomacy to

support the settlement among Iraqis; third, the U.S. military should

focus on combatting terrorists, keeping Iraq's neighbors honest,

training Iraq's troops--not on policing a civil war. Indeed, combat

troops should start to redeploy as soon as our mission is narrowed.

Those three points were overwhelmingly agreed upon by an array of the

most well informed foreign policy experts, both military and civilian,

that we have arrayed before that committee in a long time.

Since a political settlement is so critical, we have examined this

issue in detail. We have looked at the benchmarks the President has

proposed--on oil law, debaathification reform, constitutional reform,

and provincial elections--but the divisions are so deep and passions

run so high now in Iraq we may be beyond the point where such modest

measures can stabilize Iraq.

I believe, and have believed for some time, something much broader is

necessary, something much bolder is necessary. Les Gelb, the chairman

emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations and a former Defense

Department official, and I put forward just such a proposal 9 months

ago. It is premised upon our conviction that the heart of the

administration's strategy--building a strong central government--will,

in fact, not succeed. As a matter of fact, in the testimony we heard,

most pointed out where countries have been drawn by the slip of a pen

by world leaders after World War I and World War II--the Balkans, Iraq,

and many other places we could name--there have basically only been two

models that have brought stability: A straw plan, a la Saddam, or a

Federal system, a la the Iraqi Constitution.

The reason a strong central government will not work, although

desirable, is there is no trust within the Government, no trust of the

Government by the people of Iraq, no capacity of the Government to

deliver services, no capacity of this new Government to deliver

security.

In a sense, it is understandable. Indeed, we must bring Iraqis'

problems and the responsibility of managing those problems down to

local and regional levels where we can help the Iraqis build trust and

capacity much more quickly and much more effectively.

We have proposed that the Iraqis create what their constitution calls

for: three or more ``regions'' they call them--not republics--three or

four more regions consistent with their constitution. We call for

Iraq's oil to be shared equally with a guarantee that the Sunnis get

their share and have some international oversight to guarantee it. We

call for aggressive diplomacy--which, again, most every witness called

for, including the Iraq Study Group--we call for aggressive diplomacy

in the creation of a contact group consisting of Iraq's neighbors and

the major powers in the world, including large Islamic countries to

support a political settlement.

We believe we can redeploy most, if not all, of America's troops from

Iraq within 18 months under this plan, leaving behind a small force in

Iraq or in the region to strike at terrorists, the jihadists, the al-

Qaidaists, keeping the neighbors honest, and training Iraqi forces. The

time has demonstrated this plan is more relevant and inevitable than it

was even the day we put pen to paper and set it out 9 months ago. It

takes into account the harsh reality of self-sustaining sectarian

violence; it is consistent with Iraq's Constitution; and it can produce

a phrase used by a New York Times columnist in describing our plan. It

can produce ``a soft landing'' for Iraq and prevent a full-blown civil

war that tears the country apart and spreads beyond its borders.

I might also add, as people have come to understand, what I am

calling for is not partitioning, not three separate republics; what I

am calling for is what the Iraqi Constitution calls for:

decentralization of control over security and local laws with the

central government having responsibility for the Army, distribution of

resources and currency and other things that a central government must

do.

As that has become clearer and clearer, some of the most powerful

voices in the American foreign policy establishment have come forward

to suggest it makes sense.

James Baker, former Secretary of State, coauthor of the Baker-

Hamilton commission report told us that there are indications that Iraq

may be moving toward three autonomous regions, and ``if it is, we ought

to be prepared to try and manage the situation.''

Time is running out. We are going to have as a consequence of the

compromise reached between the Biden-Levin resolution and the Warner

resolution, now known as the ``Levin-Warner whoever else is attached to

it'' resolution--we are going to have for the first time a full-blown

debate in the Senate.

I hope the administration will be listening. I suggest we are

coequal--Congress, along with the President--in deciding when, if, how

long, and under what circumstances to send Americans to war, for

shedding America's treasure and blood.