



Remarks on the Senator Floor on the Bipartisan Iraq War Resolution

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Remarks As Prepared for Delivery

Today, the Senate takes the first step in a bipartisan effort to prevent the escalation of the war in Iraq - and to adopt a new strategy for leaving Iraq without leaving chaos behind.

That first step is to debate and vote on the resolution offered by Senator Warner, and re-introduced by Senator Levin and me as a bill, that says that the Senate disagrees with the President's plan to send 17,500 more American troops into the middle of a civil war in Baghdad.

The question before us today is whether a minority of Senators will even allow the debate to start. That's what we are about to vote on.

To my colleagues who are thinking about trying to block debate, let me say this: Iraq dominates our national life. It is on the minds of tens of millions of Americans. It shapes the lives of hundreds of thousands of our men and women in uniform and their families.

That the Senate would not even debate, much less vote on, the single most urgent issue of our time, would be a total forfeiture of our responsibility. We have a duty to debate and vote on the President's plan. We have a duty to debate and vote on our overall strategy in Iraq. And we have the duty as United States Senators to demonstrate the courage of our convictions.

Three weeks ago, Secretary of State Rice presented the President's plan for Iraq to the Foreign Relations Committee. Its main feature is to send more American troops into Baghdad, in the middle of a sectarian war. The reaction on the Committee, from Republicans and Democrats alike, ranged from skepticism to profound skepticism to outright opposition. And that pretty much reflects the reaction all across the country.

Senator Hagel, Senator Levin, Senator Snowe and I wrote a resolution to give Senators a way to vote what their voices were saying. We believe that the quickest, most effective way to get the President to change course is to demonstrate to him that his policy has little or no support across the board.

After we introduced our resolution, Senator Warner came forward with his. The bottom line of our resolutions is the same: Mr. President, don't send more Americans into the middle of civil war.

There was one critical difference. As originally written, Senator Warner's resolution left open the possibility of increasing the overall number of American troops in Iraq. We believed that would send the wrong message.

We should be drawing down, not ramping up, and redeploying our forces that remain in Iraq. That's the best way to make it clear to the Iraqi leaders that they must begin to make the hard compromises necessary for the political solution virtually everyone agrees is necessary. We approached Senator Warner to work out the differences. I am very pleased to say that we succeeded in doing just that.

The language Senator Warner removed from his resolution removed the possibility that it could be read as calling for more U.S. troops in Iraq. With that change, we agreed to support his resolution.

When I first spoke out against the President's planned surge before the New Year, I made it clear that I hoped to build and demonstrate bi-partisan opposition to his plan because that was the fastest way to turn him around. And that is exactly what we have done.

Now, we have a real opportunity for the Senate to speak clearly. Every Senator should be given a chance to vote whether he or she approves or disapproves with the President's plan to send more troops into the middle of a civil war. The debate we will have is as important as the vote. I hope the American people listen carefully.

I predict they will hear very few of our colleagues stand up and support the President's plan to send more troops into the middle of a civil war. Listen to the voices - as well as the votes.

Just as important as what we are voting against, is what we are voting for.

This bill, like the Biden-Hagel-Levin-Snowe bill makes three things clear.

- First, Iraq needs a political settlement to end the sectarian violence.
- Second, the United States must work with other nations to develop a "regional, internationally-sponsored peace and reconciliation process for Iraq."
- Third, the mission of US armed forces should be confined to counter-terrorism, training, and maintaining the territorial integrity of Iraq. The mission should not include policing a sectarian civil war. That will require significantly fewer troops than we have in Iraq now.

As I said at the outset, this is a first step. But it can set the foundation for everything that follows. If the President does not listen to the majority of Congress and the majority of the American people, we will look at other ways to turn the surge around.

Even if we succeed in that effort, we still need to turn our overall Iraq policy around. We need a strategy that can produce a political settlement in Iraq. That's the only way to stop Shiites and Sunnis from killing each other and to allow our troops to leave Iraq without trading a dictator for chaos.

I have proposed just such a strategy, and I'll have more to say about it in the days ahead.

But for today, my message is simple: the American people want us to debate Iraq, the most important issue of our day. They expect it. They demand it. If we try to hide behind procedure and delaying tactics, the

American people will hold us accountable. They get it.

The question is: do we?

Are we for or against the President's plan to escalate the war in Iraq? I am against it and I believe the majority of my colleagues are as well.