

## **More Republicans Join Critics Of Bush Troop-Surge Strategy Warner Is Latest to Break With White House Plan; A Bipartisan Resolution**

By DAVID ROGERS January 23, 2007; Page A5

WASHINGTON -- Weighing into the Iraq debate, the Republican past chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee broke ranks with the White House over sending 21,500 more U.S. troops to the war zone, especially for the purpose of quelling sectarian violence in Baghdad.

"The American GI was not trained, not sent over there, certainly not by resolution of this institution, to be placed in the middle of a fight between the Sunni and Shia and the wanton and just incomprehensible killing that's going on at this time," said Sen. John Warner (R., Va.) "That's a mission that's important...but it should be performed by the Iraqi forces and not the coalition forces."

Mr. Warner's remarks came as he and a handful of senators from both parties joined in offering a nonbinding Senate resolution intended to give voice to concerns about President Bush's policy. The tone is softer than a companion proposal offered last week by leading Democrats and Sen. Chuck Hagel (R., Neb.), but showed promise last night of sparking negotiations on a compromise able to maximize support from both parties.

"This resolution is aimed at broadening the support for the resolution dealing with the president's plan," said Sen. Ben Nelson (D., Neb.), who joined with Mr. Warner and Sen. Susan Collins (R., Maine) in drafting the resolution. In an interview last evening, Mr. Hagel said that Sen. Warner had allowed him to preview the language on Friday and found it to be, in some instances, more detailed than his own in specifying what course the administration should follow.

"The bottom line is this is a pretty significant piece of legislation," Mr. Hagel said. "In no way is this good news for the administration."

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Joe Biden (D., Del.), a chief sponsor of the earlier resolution with Sen. Hagel, has called a meeting tomorrow on the matter and signaled a willingness to accept changes to broaden support.

"What's striking is that the bottom line of both resolutions is the same: bipartisan opposition to the president's plan to send more American troops to Iraq to fight a civil war," said a Biden aide. "We're open to working with anybody and working on language to get a broad majority behind our resolution."

Nonetheless, the situation is complicated by the growing rivalry among would-be Democratic presidential candidates, including Mr. Biden himself. The Delaware Democrat has to navigate through this thicket, and if the various camps aren't careful, the whole debate could degenerate into the sort of political word games and posturing that so often bring ridicule on the Senate.

Mr. Bush, who delivers his State of the Union address before a joint session of Congress this evening, has shown no sign of backing away from the planned deployment of four infantry

combat brigades over the coming months. But the nervousness among Republicans is palpable, especially among those up for re-election in 2008.

House Republican Leader John Boehner of Ohio surprised some of his own colleagues by proposing the creation of a bipartisan House select committee to oversee the president's strategy in Iraq and hold the White House accountable for achieving prescribed "benchmarks." And among the Republican senators speaking out most forcefully now are several facing re-election in two years.

"We're all struggling as to what the right thing to do is. On issues like this you are going to make some people happy and some people unhappy," said Sen. Norm Coleman (R., Minn.).

Mr. Warner, who will be 80 next month, is weighing his own future and whether to seek another term in 2008. Virginia just elected a Democrat, Sen. Jim Webb, a Vietnam veteran who ran strongly against the president on the war issue and will deliver the Democratic response to the State of the Union. But apart from any political considerations, Mr. Warner's unhappiness with the direction of the war has been growing for some time, and if he should break fully with the president, it would be a major blow.

"It's clear that the United States' strategy and operations in Iraq can only be sustained and achieved with the support of the American people," Mr. Warner said "I'm a veteran of the Vietnam period when I was secretary of the Navy, and while I suggest that that conflict does not have any direct parallels to this, I did witness the decline of the public support."

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