Mr. Speaker, in recent

weeks we have seen a seemingly new

conflict begin to emerge in the Balkans

with fighting in Kosovo. I say seemingly

because it is really a conflict

that has been around for quite some

time.

As the co-chairman of the Helsinki

Commission in the mid-1980s, human

rights violations were the first issue

regarding the former Yugoslavia with

which I and the Commission was confronted.

In April 1990, 2 years before

Bosnia would enter our foreign policy

debates, I and other Members of the

commission traveled to Kosovo and

witnessed firsthand the repression

which was building in Kosovo as the

basis for Slobodan Milosevic’s rise to

power.

During the Croatian and Bosnian

conflicts, Kosovo no longer became a

leading concern, as the Serbian regime

directed its nationalist ambitions toward

the north, and the Kosovar Albanians

attempted to avoid bloodshed

through a highly commendable passive

resistance to Serbian rule. Even at

that time, the Commission had focused

on Kosovo in hearings and briefings as

a potential site for spillover of the conflict.

Finally, in the post-Dayton period

the Commission has seen that Kosovo

remains explosive, as indicated in a

Commission visit and report in the

summer of 1996. So for me and for other

Members, the gentleman from New

York (Mr. ENGEL), the gentleman from

Virginia (Mr. MORAN), the gentlewoman

from New York (Mrs. KELLY),

and the gentleman from New Jersey

(Mr. SMITH), Kosovo is not new.

Despite the complexities of the Balkans,

the simple fact is that the regime

of Slobodan Milosevic has fermented

hatred between the peoples of the

former Yugoslavia as a means to maintain

power and ward off democratic development

in Serbia itself.

In 1989, Milosevic unilaterally revoked

Kosovo’s previous autonomy. He

made discrimination against ethnic Albanians,

who constitute 90 percent of

the population of Kosovo, official policy,

especially in terms of employment.

His police force in Kosovo, which is, in

effect, more of an army, has arbitrarily

harassed, detained, tortured, and yes,

even murdered innocent Albanians on a

regular basis.

The front page of the Washington

Post shows an Albanian mother and

her small child, victims of this Serbian

onslaught.

On a regular basis, when students

protest the lack of a university education,

they announce it in advance

and make clear their desire is to do so

peacefully. The response to the exercise

of freedom of assembly and expression?

They are beaten.

The recent fighting in central Kosovo

can be traced to a few Kosovar Albanians

who have formed a Kosovo liberation

army and seek to fight repression

with terrorism. They are wrong and

their actions should be condemned.

That said, and I say it strongly, the

presence of these individuals cannot

and must not be the pretext to justify

further human rights violations by the

Milosevic regime. The attacks on several

Albanian villages which left dozens

dead and many others injured or

displaced is absolute and undeniable

contravention of the standards for the

behavior of governments as stated in

the Helsinki Final Act and other documents

of the OSCE. They are to be condemned

by this country and all freedom-

loving peoples.

At a high-level meeting of the contact

group yesterday, at which Secretary

of State Albright represented

the United States, there was agreement

to take action, as we must. In

particular, I would like to focus on

three of them which I, along with the

gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH),

raised with the Secretary beforehand.

First, the contact group supports a

new OSCE mission led by former Spanish

Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez and

the return of the mission to Kosovo,

the Sandzak and Vojvodina. Getting an

international presence on the ground

which can deter human rights violations

and report objectively on the situation

is absolutely critical.

Frankly, I believe there has not been

a sufficient effort to get a mission back

on the ground. Milosevic kicked out

the mission and opposed its return because

of Yugoslavia’s suspension of the

OSCE, yet he invited the OSCE to come

to Serbia during and after elections in

1996 and 1997, when he found it convenient.

Whatever else we do, Mr. Speaker, we

must create this international presence

on the ground as a first step.

Second, the contact group urged the

prosecutor of the international criminal

tribunal for the former Yugoslavia

to gather information related to the violence

in Kosovo which may fall within

its jurisdiction.

Third, the contact group recommended

adoption of the mandate for

UNPREDEP, the U.N. peacekeeping

force in neighboring Macedonia, which

has a U.S. contingent.

Mr. Speaker, this House, the Senate

and this Nation must speak out for the

safety of those in Kosovo.

If Kosovo explodes, its potential for direct

spillover into neighboring countries is actually

greater than it was for Bosnia, and we must

be prepared for that threat.

As far as political and economic sanctions

on Belgrade, Russia has indicated opposition

at this time. I hope Moscow reconsiders this

position. While it calls for sanctions on Latvia

resulting from a demonstration in which no injuries

were reported, the Russian Government

opposed sanctions against a regime which

brutally attacked whole villages and caused

more than 75 fatalities, including women and

children.

Finally, I want to make clear that my opposition

to Slobodan Milosevic is not opposition to

the Serbian people. They, too, are victims in

all of this. They are denied their basic human

rights through limits on a free media, rigged

elections and harassment by the authorities.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, we need to focus

more squarely not just on ethnic conflict in the

Balkans, but on democratization in Serbia. Ultimately,

we cannot rely on Slobodan

Milosevic to maintain stability in the Balkans,

a democratic Serbia is essential to that end, in

Bosnia and in Kosovo.

Given our witness to the horrors which took

place in Bosnia, we should be aware of the

dangers of Kosovo. As Polish foreign minister,

and OSCE chairman, Bronislav Gerememek

said in February, ‘‘In Kosovo we are witnessing

a conflict in preparation \* \* \* it would be

inexcusable for the OSCE to remain passive

regarding Kosovo.’’ I fully agree, and hope my

colleagues will support strong action to prevent

a new and potentially more dangerous

conflict in the Balkans.