Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight in what I

hope will be a nightly discussion in this body on what I think is one

of the most dangerous involvements of our military in recent time; that

is the ongoing situation in Kosovo.

It is my hope that Members on both sides of the aisle will rise on

the House floor at the end of each day's session, as we saw to some

extent in the 5-minute special orders today, to discuss the current

situation, what our plans are, to interact and engage with the

administration, not necessarily in a partisan way, but in a way to look

for solutions that bring dignity to the people of Kosovo, that bring

stability and sense back to the Balkans, and that provide the best

possible course of action for the safety of American soldiers and those

who are currently involved and those who might be involved in the

Balkan Theater.

Let me first of all say that this should be constructive discussion,

again, and should not be based on partisan rhetoric or name calling.

Now, with our troops deployed in the air assault, should not be the

time for us to tear down past actions even though we may disagree with

them. But I think two things are certainly clear that we should make at

the beginning of each of our discussions, so that no one can

misinterpret the debate or the discussion in this country about

America's position in Kosovo.

The first is that no one, including Milosevic, should underestimate

America's resolve to stop the torture, the ethnic cleansing and the

bloodshed that he has perpetrated on the people of his nation and

especially the people of Kosovo. He should understand that Republicans

and Democrats are united in their resolve to make sure that he is held

accountable for the atrocities that he has perpetrated on innocent

people. No one should underestimate our resolve in that area.

The second point that we should make clear at the outset is a simple

one and one that we all agree on, and that is that we unequivocally

support our troops. They are in harm's way right now. They have our

full prayers

and blessings. Each and every one of our colleagues in this body and

the other body are doing everything possible to give our men and women

serving on behalf of this Nation all the support, the resources, the

tools, and the equipment and protection they need to carry out their

mission.

Those two things are unmistakable. Those two things are not in the

debate. We are committed to deal with Milosevic as a Congress and as a

country, and we are behind the President in that. We are committed to

support our troops in their deployment that they are currently

pursuing.

But, Mr. Speaker, I am concerned with some of the rhetoric that I am

hearing on the talk shows. I have done appearances on the networks and

today with CNN. I am listening to some of my colleagues and some of the

discussion from the think tank experts inside the beltway here who are

moving very rapidly toward the notion that we should prepare or, if not

prepare, that we should actually deploy American troops on the ground.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very dangerous decision that we must consider

carefully, completely, and thoroughly. Even though I did not agree with

the President's initial position to get us involved in a NATO-sponsored

air campaign, I do think that we need to have a discussion about where

we go from here.

I think all of us listened to the White House tell us that perhaps a

short period of time would transpire, when we started the aerial

assault, and then Milosevic would in fact give in. Unfortunately, we

are now into weeks instead of days, and there does not seem to appear

to be a lessening of Milosevic's resolve.

But before we move into the next phase and prepare or actually send

in American ground troops, we in this body had better have some very

serious discussion and debate about what our policy is and what it

should be, because committing ground troops carries heavy burdens.

I think we still have some other options. The ground troops from

America should only be committed as a final resort, as a last resort

when we have depleted and used up all other options that are available

to us. I am convinced that we have not yet reached that point. In fact,

I think we have some very serious things that we could be doing, which

I will outline in a few moments.

I also want to make the point very clearly, Mr. Speaker, that when

our colleagues and when the pundits inside the beltway talk about

deploying our troops, they need to understand what that means. It is

too easy for Members of Congress to say ``send in the troops.'' These

are not robots we are talking about. These are human beings. They are

the sons and the daughters and the moms and dads of the American

people.

When we commit our young people and our military personnel to go into

harm's way, we had better have thought through the actual activity for

which they are going to be involved. We better think about the

objectives. We better think about the danger to their lives.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, my concern is that some of the people inside of

this beltway want to commit our troops too quickly, and that has

resulted in a terrible problem that we are not now trying to deal with

within the military.

In fact, let me show a chart here, Mr. Speaker, which I think sums up

the situation very well. In the years from World War II until 1990 and

1991, all of the commanders in chief during that time period that

started with Dwight D. Eisenhower and Harry Truman and then went on to

John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan and

George Bush, in all of those years, under all of those Presidents,

Republicans and Democrats alike, they committed our troops just 10

times, 10 deployments in 40 years, only where it was absolutely

essential to put our troops in harm's way.

From 1991 until today with the Kosovo deployment, we have seen our

troops deployed 33 times. Ten times in 40 years, 33 times in the last 8

years.

Mr. Speaker, none of these 33 deployments were budgeted for or paid

for in advance. The cost for all of these deployments came out of an

already decreasing defense budget. Bosnia up until now has cost the

American taxpayers $10 billion. All of that had to be eaten out of

other defense requirements and priorities or had to be funded through

special supplemental appropriations.

Kosovo, in the short period of time we have been deployed there, has

cost the American taxpayer $2 billion, and the daily price tag for

Kosovo is increasing exponentially.

Members of Congress and pundits in Washington who are quick to want

to commit our troops to this 33rd ground deployment need to understand

that we have not identified, first of all, a way to pay for this

operation.

But that is not the largest issue involved here, Mr. Speaker. Because

we have deployed our troops 33 times in 8 years, because we have sent

our troops from Macedonia, to Bosnia, to Somalia, to Haiti, to domestic

situations, from Kuwait to now the deployment in Kosovo, the morale

among our young people in the military is starting to suffer.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the retention rate for pilots in the Navy and the

Air Force is the lowest it has been since World War II. The Army is

having such a difficult time recruiting young people to go into the

Army that they are now resorting to lowering the threshold. Secretary

Caldera has suggested that we should now allow non-high school

graduates to sign up for Army service. In fact, we have Navy ships at

sea today who are 600 and 700 sailors short from the required optimum

strength that they should be carrying in the deployments that they are

completing.

These situations are not happening in a vacuum, Mr. Speaker. They are

happening because of this deployment rate of committing our troops

month after month around the world in a number of situations which

requires these young people to be away from their families and children

for much longer periods of time.

In addition to morale problems, the cutbacks in our funding necessary

to pay for these deployments are causing us to stretch out programs so

that we are not modernizing our military the way we should.

I understand that President Clinton will be, or maybe he did today

deliver a speech to our B-52 pilots. I am glad he did that. It is

important to let them know that we are behind them. But I wish the

President would address to them the fact that those B-52s are going to

be flying when they are 75 years old because we have not provided the

funding to replace those aircraft in a more timely manner.

That is the real tragedy of what we are doing with our rapid

deployment, with our increased OPTEMPO rate, and yet not providing the

support to maintain the readiness of our troops that they so

desperately need.

All of those factors must be considered in the equation of whether or

not America should put ground troops into Kosovo. I think it is a very

serious challenge that we have ahead of us, Mr. Speaker, in considering

whether or not we should support the administration's efforts to move

forward with a multinational ground force, especially one that involves

U.S. troops.

We need to understand that unless this Congress is prepared to

address the issues that are causing morale problems in the services

today, that are causing retention rates to be at the lowest point ever,

to cause young military personnel to want to leave the service instead

of reenlisting, then we have got a major problem.

I would challenge our colleagues, Mr. Speaker, that are so adamant

today about committing ground troops. Are they prepared to support the

reinstatement of the draft if we continue to have problems with young

people not signing up for the military? Are they willing to vote to

reinstate the draft, as we did during the Vietnam War, to suck young

people in, to force them to go into combat?

That could be the need if we continue to have the problems that we

are having because of the deployment of troops today around the world,

troops that continue to provide cover in Haiti, continue to be in

Bosnia, continue to be in Somalia, continue to be in Kuwait, continue

to be in Macedonia, and now may be expected to go into Kosovo perhaps

even in large numbers.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Kosovo deployment that is being talked about

now by the U.N., whether it is under the title of peacekeeping or a

military force, is going to involve conflict, it is going to involve

hostile actions, it is going to involve casualties, and it is going to

involve loss of life. Before we make that commitment, this Congress

needs to make sure that we have explored every other option.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the House floor tonight because I do not think

we have explored every other option. I want to present one and I want

to challenge the administration tonight to follow through on my

suggestion.

Mr. Speaker, as many of our colleagues know, I focus a lot of my time

on dealing with Russia. I formed and I chair the congressional

initiative between our Congress and the Russian parliament, the State

Duma. I have been to Russia a number of times. I host members of the

Duma when they come to Washington, and I interact with Duma leaders on

a regular basis. In fact, of the 450 members of the State Duma, I know

over 150 members personally, including the leaders of all the seven

main factions that lead the State Duma in their deliberations.

In fact, I was supposed to speak at Harvard University before the end

of April to the visiting class of Duma deputies that Harvard runs a

training program for each year to give them the orientation of the way

our Congress works in America so that the Russian Duma can learn from

our experiences.

Last week, the Russian Duma canceled the next visit that they were

planning to make to Harvard. They canceled that visit because of the

Kosovo situation. Last week, Mr. Speaker, I talked to my friend in the

Duma on the phone, after having met with a couple of Russian leaders in

person at a conference last week in Philadelphia.

One of my friends who is a senior leader of the support of the

Russian Duma told me that in the 7 years since the reforms in Russia he

had never seen the hostile feelings toward America as he is seeing

right now because of Kosovo. In fact, he told me that almost every Duma

deputy from the radical fringe of the communist and the LDPR's

Zhirinovsky faction to the moderate members of the Duma and Yabloko

faction, every member of the Duma is expressing outrage, outrage not

only at the continual bombing in Kosovo, the bombing of Serbia, but

outrage that Russia was not brought into a fuller dialogue in trying to

find a way to end this crisis.

In fact, one of my friends told me that it is a dangerous situation

in Russia right now. With President Yeltsin having illness problems

and, I think, widely acknowledged as not being in total control of what

is happening in Russia, there is more and more feeling that Russia may

do things that create serious instability between the U.S. and Russia.

That would be an international tragedy.

If Russia were to start supplying military equipment to the Serbians

or if Russia were to even think about providing support in terms of

forces to the Serbs, we would have a very, very dangerous and volatile

situation.

We need to understand, Mr. Speaker, that there are some alternatives,

and at least one that should be pursued. I understand that the

President's initial action through NATO was to have the NATO countries,

through a massive air campaign, bomb Milosevic into submission. Up

until now, that has not worked. It may work in the future. And

according to our President, we are in there for the long haul. That is

going to be a terrible price we are going to pay both in terms of

destruction to innocent people and buildings, also in terms of dollar

investments on the part of the U.S.

My concern is that if we do not think through this process, we could

see a situation where Russia could enter this conflict on the other

side. I have no doubt that we would be victorious and that we would win

any such battle. But, Mr. Speaker, we do not want Kosovo to be the

start of a world war or a major conflict involving two nations with

very capable nuclear weapons.

On Friday evening, Mr. Speaker, I received a telephone call from two

of my friends in Russia who are involved in the State Duma. They had

faxed to me earlier that day a memo asking if I would review a

preliminary plan that they had put together that would perhaps provide

a solution to end the hostilities in Kosovo. I read the document. I

talked to the individuals on the telephone. I assessed their feelings

about the Duma rallying behind this initiative. And then I called

senior leaders in the administration to let them know that this had

occurred and that I thought it was worthy of consideration.

Over the weekend, I had additional discussions. Today I talked to

Members on both sides of the aisle, senior leaders of both parties,

about their thoughts on the ideas presented by the members of the

Russian Duma for our consideration. The individuals who called me, Mr.

Speaker, asked me to give them my response about whether or not their

ideas are realistic to begin a discussion.

Mr. Speaker, I think their ideas are worthy of consideration, and I

encourage the administration to move in beginning negotiations which we

could assist with in the Congress in terms of supporting, finding a new

solution to the hostilities in Kosovo.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, the Russian side proposed to me that

Russia would guarantee to the international community that no more

ethnic homicide or ethnic cleansing would be carried on in Kosovo. The

Russian side would guarantee that to the international community.

The second initiative that was proposed by the Russian side was that

Russia would see that Milosevic agreed to the agreements reached at the

contact working group of the NATO coalition in Rambouillet. So the

Russians were proposing as their second condition that Milosevic come

to the table agreeing to the Rambouillet accords, which the President

has said are critical.

The one caveat that they mentioned was that they thought that the

international peacekeeping force that would be put into Kosovo to

guarantee the security and the stability for the Kosovars to make sure

that conflict ended and to guarantee the rights of those citizens would

not involve the militaries of any of those nations that are today

bombing Serbia, that those nations that would make up the ground forces

to implement the agreement and the Rambouillet accord would come from

nations that are not today involved in direct hostilities against the

Serbs.

In fact, the Russians even proposed some example countries. They

suggested perhaps that these troops could come from Poland, the

Netherlands, Greece, Albania, even Russia itself, and other European

nations who have not been involved in the bombing campaign against the

Serbs.

Mr. Speaker, I think that makes absolute sense to have a

multinational force to enforce the accords that were reached in Kosovo

to protect the Kosovars, overseen by troops from countries that are not

involved in the hostilities today, who would then report to NATO as to

the progress of enforcing the agreed-upon arrangements that were

negotiated under NATO's leadership.

The third recommendation that the Russians proposed to me, Mr.

Speaker, was that we establish a bilateral commission, a bilateral

commission that in fact would be assembled in an informal way to

monitor the Albanian Government's compliance, the Serbian Government's

compliance with the agreed-upon framework established by NATO so that

the parliamentarians of both nations would be involved. Not to set

foreign policy, not to overrule or supersede the authority of the one

leader we have in America, and that is our President, but to make sure

from a parliamentary standpoint that all aspects of both governments,

both parties in this country and all seven factions in Russia were, on

a daily basis, monitoring the compliance to the peace accords that had

been reached, which Milosevic would have agreed to.

Mr. Speaker, I think these initiatives are worthy of discussion. I

think these initiatives are the direction that we should be going in

terms of dialoguing with Russia about the situation in Kosovo and our

relationship with Serbia. I am not saying it is the end-all or the

cure-all or a perfect solution. But this is far better to talk about

than to talk about preparing Americans to go into a ground war campaign

and to look at killing more lives.

Someone at some point in time is going to have to pay to rebuild

Serbia

and Kosovo. We need to understand that it should be our top priority

today to find a peaceful way out of this conflict that allows dignity

and respect for NATO, that allows dignity and respect for the process

that we use, that allows Russia to regain the dignity in their

relationship in the past with Serbia, and that shows Milosevic that

neither Russia nor the U.S. nor the allied nations will tolerate the

kind of actions that he has perpetrated on the people of Kosovo.

That is the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, that we have right now.

I have offered to my Russian friends to engage them wherever that

might take place. They have talked about coming here. If need be, we

could go there. But we need to find a way to proactively engage Russia

in this solution.

I also think there is one other point that we should make, Mr.

Speaker. The American taxpayers each year put approximately $600

million to $1 billion of U.S. tax money into the Russian economy. We do

it through the cooperative threat reduction. We do it through economic

development assistance through the Department of Commerce. We do it

through the Defense Department with joint military programs and

exchanges. We do it through the Environmental Protection Agency through

environmental initiatives. We do it through a multitude of agencies and

operations of the Federal Government.

Not only do I think it is in our interest to have Russia be more

involved, I think Russia has a responsibility. America has been very

helpful in securing additional funding for the replenishment of the IMF

so that Russia can continue to work economically. America has been very

aggressive in helping Russia deal with environmental problems, nuclear

stabilization. In fact, the President just proposed this year an

increase of $1.4 billion over 5 years to further help Russia stabilize

its nuclear arsenal.

It is time that we called Russia in, not just through a long distance

phone call, but in a real and substantive way, with all factions

involved, from the radical left to the radical right, in helping us

solve the problem of Kosovo in a way that reduces the risk of losing

more lives, of damaging more property, and in a way that could lead to

a further escalation of conflict.

So, Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight and I challenge the administration to

take up the challenge that was given to me by my Russian friends who

want to see us find a peaceful way, a peaceful way out of what is

becoming a terrible tragedy and yet a peaceful way that recognizes that

Milosevic is dead wrong and must be dealt with in an aggressive, firm

way. There is still that possibility. We must take up that effort. And

we must stop the talking about a ground war operation, a ground

campaign and subjecting young Americans in a way that is going to cost

lives and cause serious hardship for American families.