Madam Speaker, I rise this evening to

continue the discussion on the situation that we face in Kosovo, and

what I think is an historic opportunity that hopefully we have not yet

missed to solve that crisis without putting our troops into further

harm's way.

In fact, today, Madam Speaker, the President called up 2,116 military

reserve troops to active duty and authorized 33,000 reservists to be

called up in the near future. The air war continues, the bombing and

the destruction continues, yet the resolve of the Serbs seems to also

continue with no end in sight.

Many of us are concerned that we do not have a solid plan to end the

conflict and that we do not have a strategy to win the conflict.

Therefore, this continuing escalation of the aerial assault on the

former Yugoslavia causes a great deal of concern for our colleagues on

both sides of the aisle.

Tomorrow, Madam Speaker, we are going to be asked to vote on one of

several alternatives, including the War Powers Act resolution to

withdraw our troops from the former Yugoslavia. A second alternative is

to declare war against Yugoslavia, and a third option is an alternative

that would have us say to the administration that no dollars can be

expended for the insertion of ground troops unless the Congress has

given its approval.

Now, we all know, Madam Speaker, that these resolutions may or may

not pass, but this administration will continue on its course. They

have not consulted with the Congress in the past; I do not think that

is going to change. I think we are going to continue to see a movement

that is aggressively pursuing the aerial campaign and eventually,

perhaps, the insertion of ground troops. If that time comes, Madam

Speaker, we face some very dangerous prospects.

One only has to look at history to understand how the Serbs stood up

against Hitler from the period of 1941 to 1945. Even though the Germans

had not only their 22 divisions but the help of 200,000 Croatians,

Slovenian and Bosnian Muslim volunteer auxiliaries, they were able to

repel Hitler, they were able to retain the control of their land and,

in fact, in the end, they won a victory.

Now, I am not saying that if we get involved in a direct

confrontation with Serbia that we cannot win. Make no mistake about it,

we can. We have the finest fighting force in the world, and with the

help of our NATO allies, I am sure we could prevail, but it would not

be without cost. Furthermore, Madam Speaker, what really concerns me is

the position that perhaps we will put the Russians in.

Russia has already indicated it will not honor our naval blockade

that is designed to prevent additional oil supplies from getting into

Serbia to resupply the military and the economy. Russia could be put

into a position where it is asked to protect the resupply efforts to

get food and necessary materials into Serbia. In either of those cases,

we set up a situation where the United States and Russia could come

into direct conflict, perhaps even hostile action, our troops against

theirs, the NATO troops against the Russians and the Serbs. That would

be catastrophic. Again, not because I do not think we would win that

battle, because I think we would. But the toll that it would take in

loss of life and the ending result of us then having to control the

former Yugoslavia and partition it and the extensive amount of

investment that we would have to make leads me to believe that that is

not the right course for us to be taking.

Madam Speaker, there is an alternative. Almost one month ago I first

proposed that alternative. In fact, in the first week of April I sent

out ``Dear Colleague'' letters and a press release calling for this

administration to involve the leadership in Russia in a more direct

way, to get the Russian government and the Russian officials to help us

bring Milosevic to the table. I felt very simply that Russia owed us

that, partly because we are putting almost $1 billion a year into

Russia's economy, all of which I support. We are providing food

supplies to the Russian people. But I also think with that aid comes a

responsibility for Russia to assist us in bringing Milosevic and the

Serbian leadership to the table so that we can try to find a way to end

this conflict short of an all-out ground war.

Interestingly enough, Madam Speaker, the Russians agree with us. In

fact, Madam Speaker, Russia has made overtures to us that they would

like to provide the assistance of both the government and the

parliamentarians to help bring Milosevic to understand that this

conflict must end and that he must agree to world opinion and the NATO

guidelines that have been established to allow the Kosovar people to

return to their homelands, to withdraw his troops, to agree to the

ability of the Kosovar people to live without fear and intimidation and

without the ethnic cleansing that has occurred, and to allow the

establishment of a multinational ground force to monitor compliance

with the peace agreement.

In fact, Madam Speaker, I did two special orders on April 12 and 13

where I outlined in great detail my concerns about the conflict and the

need to get Russia involved. Well, Madam Speaker, we have had that

opportunity and I want to outline that in detail tonight.

Over three weeks ago I was contacted by my friends in the Russian

Duma. As my colleagues know, five years ago I asked for the support of

then Speaker Gingrich to approach the Russian Speaker, Seleznyov on the

day that he was sworn into the Speaker's position to propose the

establishment of a new direct relationship between the parliaments of

our two nations, the Russian Duma and the American Congress. The

Russian side accepted and Speaker Gingrich and Minority Leader Gephardt

also accepted, and for one year, working with my counterpart in the

Russian Duma Vladimir Luhkin, the chairman of the International Affairs

Committee and former Ambassador from the Soviet Union and Russia to the

U.S., we met and established the parameters for our meetings. I made it

crystal-clear that in all of our discussions with the Russians, all the

factions, all of the political factions in Russia must be involved. Not

just the mainstream factions like the Our Home Russia party, the

Yabloko party, and the People's Power party, but also the Communists

who in fact control the majority or the largest sector of the Duma in

terms of votes. The regional coalition, the Agrarian faction and even

the LDPR faction, which is the Liberal Democratic party of Vladimir

Zhirinovskii. The Russians agreed to that.

Over the past five years, we have had numerous face-to-face meetings

with our Russian counterparts in Moscow and in Washington. Time and

again we have discussed difficult issues, trying to find common ground.

Many times we have found areas where we can agree. Sometimes we found

areas that we cannot agree. But we have developed a friendship and

relationships that allow us to discuss difficult issues with a feeling

of mutual respect and admiration.

So it was not surprising to me, Madam Speaker, that over three weeks

ago senior leaders from the Russian Duma would approach me as they did,

ask me to begin a dialogue of possible ways to avoid the escalation of

the Kosovo conflict and to also find ways to try to bring an end to the

situation on the terms established by our country and NATO.

Now, I was surprised, Madam Speaker, because I said to my Russian

friends, send something to me in writing, over three weeks ago. These

are the three foundations that they said they thought could be the

basis of further discussion to resolve the conflict in Kosovo. Number

one, that Russia would guarantee that there would be no more ethnic

cleansing in Kosovo or the former Yugoslavia. Number two, that Serbia

must agree to all NATO conditions, including the presence of

international troops in the former Yugoslavia. Russia, however,

suggested that the force be comprised primarily of countries not

directly involved in the bombing of the former Yugoslavia, a point that

I do not disagree with. The troops would agree to stay in Kosovo for at

least a period of 10 years. And number three, the Russians proposed the

establishment of an interparliamentary group that would include the

United States, Russia, and NATO countries to be formed to help monitor

compliance with all agreements. And, working together, this group would

cooperate with the offices of the United Nations.

Madam Speaker, these initiatives and these ideas were proposed over

three weeks ago by senior Russian parliamentarians. Immediately after I

received this overture, so as not to convey the impression that I was

somehow operating out of the bounds of the Government of the United

States, I called the Vice President's top National Security Adviser,

Leon Fuerth. I briefed him on what the Russians had proposed. In

discussions with him, it was agreed that I should call Carlos Pascual

from the National Security Council at the White House. I did that. I

sent each of these men letters outlining what the Russians had said,

what I responded, and the fact that I was going to engage the Russians

to try to find some way to bring us together, to try to find a common

conclusion and a successful conclusion to the hostilities in Kosovo.

In fact, Madam Speaker, the following week I called the Director of

the Central Intelligence Agency, George Tenet, and in a phone

conversation I briefed him about the offer made by the Russians that we

begin serious discussions. Also that week, Madam Speaker, I talked to

Ambassador Steve Sestanovich who works directly for Deputy Secretary of

State Strobe Talbott. Sistanovic has been a friend of mine for some

time involved in Russian issues, and he was someone who now has the

responsibility for affairs in the former Soviet States.

I said to Dr. Sestanovich, I told him about our discussions between

the Russians and myself, the exchange of communications, the telephone

conversations we had, and I had further discussions on an ongoing basis

that weekend with one of his top assistants, Andre Lewis. The whole

purpose, Madam Speaker, was to let the administration know that my

discussions with the Russians were meant to provide a constructive role

in trying to find a way out of this conflict, a way that would allow

the Russians to use their significant leverage to allow us to find a

solution in terms of the Kosovo crisis.

Also that week, Madam Speaker, I approached two Members of Congress.

Neither of them were Republicans. They were both Democrats, and they

are good friends of mine, people who I trust and admire, and people who

I know are also trusted by the administration: The gentleman from

Maryland (Mr. Hoyer) and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Murtha).

The gentleman from Maryland (Mr. Steny Hoyer) is my counterpart and

colleague in the Russian Duma-Congress initiative. He and I travel to

Russia together. He and I host the meetings with the Duma deputies when

they come to Washington.

I went into the discussion with each of them about my efforts, and

asked them to make contact with the administration to let the

administration know my purpose. The gentleman from Maryland (Mr. Hoyer)

said he would talk to Secretary Talbott, and the gentleman from

Pennsylvania (Mr. Murtha) said he would try to talk to the President

and/or Sandy Berger.

I took each of them at their words, and I am sure they did that, even

though I heard nothing from either Sandy Berger nor from Deputy

Secretary Strobe Talbott.

The discussions with the Russians continued, however, Madam Speaker,

throughout that week and the weekend until finally the first Deputy

Speaker of the Russian Duma, a good friend of mine, Vladimir Ryshkov,

contacted me by telephone and made a verbal offer.

He said, Congressman, I think through our discussions that we may

have an opportunity to find common

ground. He said, I would like you to bring a delegation of Republicans

and Democrats to meet with a delegation of Russian leaders in a neutral

country. He suggested that we meet in Hungary, in Budapest.

He said, in having one day of discussions, that that could be

followed, assuming we were in agreement, with a prearranged trip to

Belgrade, where we would meet firsthand, directly, face-to-face with

Milosevic to try to convince Milosevic that Republicans and Democrats

and Russians across the spectrum were united in the understanding that

Milosevic must agree to NATO's terms, and that it was in Serbia's best

interests to come to the table and agree with the position taken by our

governments and the NATO governments.

I said to first Deputy Speaker Ryshkov, I said, Vladimir, I want to

you to do five things for me before I will even raise this issue with

the leadership in the country and in the Congress.

I said, number one, I want to you to put that request in writing.

Give me a letter from you, as the First Deputy Speaker, asking me to

arrange such a meeting.

Number two, give me a list of the Russian delegates, the Duma

deputies and party leaders who would be a part of the Russian side of

this effort.

Number three, give me a date certain and an exact time when we would

meet as a delegation face-to-face with Milosevic in Belgrade.

Number four, get me a meeting with our POWs, so that we can tell

whether or not they are safe and whether or not they are in good

health.

And number 5, travel with me, the entire Russian delegation, and the

American delegation to a refugee camp of our choice in Macedonia, under

the supervision of our military, so that you can see with us the horror

and the terrible atrocities that have been committed by Milosevic and

the Serbs on the people of Kosovo.

On Wednesday of last week, Madam Speaker, Ryshkov wrote back to me

and agreed to all five requests that I made. He put the request in

writing. He identified the Duma deputies that would be involved in

these discussions.

It was an historic group: Ryshkov himself, a member of the Nash Dom

faction, the party leader for Chernomyrdin's own party.

The second member was Luhkin, a leader in the Yablako faction, a

mainstream pro-west faction. In fact, Luhkin said it would have been

the first time ever that the Yablako faction would insert itself into

the issue of Yugoslavia, but they thought it was so important that they

engaged with us in the Congress on this issue that he would come

himself for these meetings, both in Budapest as well as in Belgrade.

The third member of the delegation would be sharp an off, a senior

Communist leader who would have the ear and would have the support of

the Speaker of the Duma, Gennady Seleznyov, the Communist party leader

who has the largest number of votes in the Duma, and he would in fact

be able to represent that faction.

The fourth member of the delegation was Mr. Greshin, a member of the

Peoples' Power faction, a very respected member of the Duma.

The fifth member would have been Sergei Konovalenko, the chief

protocol officer of the Russian Duma and a good friend of mine.

That was the delegation, Madam Speaker, a solid group of progressive

Russian leaders, not the hardline people that we have heard so much

about in the past; not the people that Yeltsin referred to in the Duma

as thugs and rogues, and not the people that we have heard in the West

have been trivialized as nonplayers.

These are the future of Russia, good, solid leaders that want the

same thing that we want in America: a stable country, stable economic

growth, free democracy, and a closer, stronger relationship with the

U.S.

The third request was for the date and time certain for the meeting

with Milosevic. The Russians got that assurance from Milosevic's top

aide. We were to have met face-to-face with Milosevic yesterday,

Monday, at 1 p.m. in Belgrade. The Russians told me that they would not

go into Belgrade, did they not have that commitment to meet face-to-

face with Milosevic.

The fourth request was to meet with our POWs. The Russians certified

to me that Milosevic had agreed with that request. We would have been

the first body, even prior to the Red Cross, to meet with our POWs to

make sure they were okay and to let them know that we had not forgotten

them.

The last request was also agreed to. That was to have the five

Russian leaders travel with us to a Macedonian refugee camp of our

choice. In fact, I consulted with the State Department to obtain the

location of the two most dramatic refugee camps, to let the Russians

see the terrible problems that Milosevic has brought to bear on the

people of Kosovo.

The Russians agreed to all of those issues. In fact, we were set up

to do this this past weekend. We would have left the theater by going

back to Sofia, Bulgaria. The American side would have come back to

Washington. The Russians would have gone to Moscow. The following week

we would have met in Washington to continue our discussions, a good-

faith effort on the part of the Russians to find common ground.

Madam Speaker, all last week I could not get an answer from the

administration. I called Sandy Berger three times. I told his staff

what I wanted. I said I had briefed the administration, I had briefed

the CIA, I had briefed the intelligence community, I had briefed the

State Department, I had briefed the White House. I have not told any

Republicans. This is a good-faith effort that I have gone to Democrats

with to try to find a way to reach common ground.

Sandy Berger never returned my phone calls, and neither did Strobe

Talbott, until I went to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. Hoyer) again

and I said to my good friend and colleague, can you help us get a face-

to-face meeting with Strobe Talbott? He said, I have talked to him. You

need to call him.

On Thursday, after I had briefed the gentleman from Illinois (Speaker

Denny Hastert) in the morning and asked for his cooperation, the

response of the gentleman from Illinois (Speaker Hastert) was that he

was supportive, but that I should keep working with the administration,

and I told him that I was.

About 12:30 on Thursday, I finally reached Strobe Talbott, and Deputy

Secretary Talbott said, I will meet with you today. I said that I

wanted to bring the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. Hoyer) with me.

About 1 o'clock we traveled down to the State Department and had a

sandwich with the Deputy Secretary of State, and for about 1\1/2\,

Madam Speaker, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. Steny Hoyer) and I met

with Strobe Talbott and three of his senior staff experts on Russia to

discuss the initiative in detail.

I went through all the background. I talked about the purpose, that

we were not going to Belgrade to negotiate because we were not

representatives of the administration, we are not Secretaries of State.

That was never our intent, and that would never be our desire.

We were there to present a common, unified front, Russian elected

officials, American elected officials, in solidarity to Milosevic

saying that this must end, and he must understand that as individuals

who both supported the President and opposed the President, we now felt

it important to give him one last chance to find a way to peacefully

resolve this situation, or we would go back to America and use our

collective voices to bring every ounce of energy we had in finding ways

to solve this situation militarily.

After the briefing, Deputy Secretary of State Talbott responded that

he did not think it was a good idea, and he gave us two reasons. He

said, first of all, I am concerned for your safety. I responded, Mr.

Secretary, I am concerned for my safety, as well. I would not do

something that I felt inside of me was going to endanger my own life,

let alone the lives of my colleagues.

I felt confident, I told him, that the Russians, in going with us,

along with one of the senior advisers to Milosevic on the bus ride from

Hungary, from Budapest down to Belgrade, would in fact make sure we

were protected. And by having the U.S. Army as our escort, we knew full

well that our military would be briefed as to our whereabouts.

The second issue that was raised by Deputy Secretary of State Talbott

was,

well, we think Milosevic may try to use you in this very laudable

effort.

I said to Deputy Secretary Talbott, well, how would he use us? He

said, well, he may try to say things that really are not your intent.

My response was, Mr. Secretary, I have been in politics for 20 years. I

understand that people try to use other people in politics. We were not

naive.

And in fact, Milosevic only had one TV station operating. I said, how

much spin can Milosevic create on our visit to Belgrade, when we were

going to follow that visit by taking five of the senior leaders of the

Russian political parties to a refugee camp where hundreds of western

media, cameras, and reporters could photograph an interview, senior

Russian officials holding the children of Kosovo refugees, speaking to

the wives and daughters of husbands, fathers, sons and brothers who

have been massacred by Milosevic?

Far better would we have had the western media report on our effort

by that visit of the senior Russian officials than to worry about

somehow Milosevic misinterpreting our attempt in going to Belgrade.

In fact, Madam Speaker, because Strobe Talbott saw that he could not

convince me of his position, we ended our conversation after 1\1/2\

hours with him telling me that he would take the request of support to

both Sandy Berger and to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright; that he

was about to go into a meeting with the President, and he would meet

with them prior to that meeting, and would call us back Thursday

evening.

I had to move on this issue, Madam Speaker, because we were scheduled

to leave on Saturday, if it was to come about. On Thursday night we got

the word back from the State Department that it was the feeling of

Secretary Albright and Strobe Talbott and Sandy Berger that we should

not go to meet with the Russians, that we should not seize the

opportunity to find a peaceful way to resolve this crisis.

I was extremely upset and frustrated. On Friday morning I held a

press conference and announced the fact that I had called the Russians

and told them that we were postponing our trip, much to our dismay. The

Russians were devastated.

In fact, Ryshkov had a press conference, Luhkin had a press

conference and talked about the initiative, and talked about the

willingness of the Congress, Democrats and Republicans, to try to find

common ground to end this conflict without additional American

bloodshed, as well as bloodshed from other nations.

It was interesting, Madam Speaker, that I was scheduled at noon on

Friday in advance to host the President of Ukraine for lunch. President

Kuchma was in town, and as a leader of the Ukrainian American

initiative, I had agreed with eight of my colleagues to host him in the

lunchroom downstairs.

We did that, and following the luncheon we went to an adjacent room

for a press conference. Several members of the President's party stood

up and praised president Kuchma for coming to Washington for the NATO

summit, to be a part of the partnership for peace effort.

One of my colleagues praised president Kuchma and said this, that

President Kuchma and Ukraine are to be commended because they

understand the role that America is taking, and they support the effort

to try to find a solution to this crisis.

It is interesting, Madam Speaker, that when President Kuchma spoke,

he gave his vision for a solution to the Kosovo crisis, which I will

include in the Record.

The material referred to is as follows:

President Kuchma from the Ukraine had exactly the same solution

proposed by the Russians 3\1/2\ weeks ago that was praised by members

of the President's own party at the press conference on Friday

afternoon.

Very upset by the fact that we had to cancel or postpone the trip to

meet with the Russians, over the weekend I continued to have a dialogue

with my Russian colleagues.

Deputy Ryshkov came back and said he still had a desire to meet. I

said that I thought that was something we should do, and on Monday

morning of this week, yesterday morning, I proposed that this week we

meet again; that this time we meet in a European capital, perhaps

Vienna, perhaps Sofia, but a capital that is from a nonaligned area

where both our Russian friends and Americans, of both Republican and

Democrat persuasions, can come together and see if we cannot find

common ground.

Madam Speaker, that meeting will take place on Friday, and at this

point in time I believe it will be held in Vienna. We will meet in a

frank and candid manner, informally. We are not representing the U.S.

Government. We are not negotiating on behalf of this President. We are

not negotiating on behalf of Secretary Albright. In fact, we are doing

what Strobe Talbott suggested in our meeting on Thursday was proper and

appropriate, and that is continuing a dialogue with our Russian

colleagues in the Duma.

The dialogue will focus on whether or not we, as Americans, Democrats

and Republicans, and Russians of the seven major factions in the Duma,

can come together in a common solution that Russia can live with and

that Russia feels they can convince Milosevic to accept and, at the

same time, an agreement that retains the dignity and the respect of

NATO and our government.

Madam Speaker, I think that is possible. I see the real difficult

issue right now not in getting the Russians to agree that NATO's

initiatives, its 5-point plan, should be agreed to. The Russians have

already said that they understand the need for NATO to play that key

role.

The key issue for the Russians and for Milosevic and the Serbs is

their contention that the multinational ground force that is put into

place to enforce the agreement should not include any ground troops

from those countries that are currently bombing Serbia. Obviously, that

includes the U.S. and Great Britain, because our two nations are flying

almost 90 percent of the bombing sorties in the former Yugoslavia.

Now, Madam Speaker, personally, I do not have a problem with that. In

fact, I think it is the right thing to do. If Britain and America are

completing 90 percent of the bombing sorties, I think it only fair that

the multinational force on the ground should be made up primarily of

European countries, and, in this case, NATO countries.

Now, the Russians have even gone so far as to suggested where some of

those troops might come from. They suggested Greece, the Netherlands,

Poland, and Albania. They even suggested Russia itself would put troops

in, if that be our desire. The key issue for us is convincing the

Russians and having them convince the Serbs and Milosevic that the

oversight of that international peacekeeping effort must involve NATO

and must involve the U.S.

Madam Speaker, we have an opportunity to resolve this crisis without

further bloodshed. I was hoping, Madam Speaker, that we would not have

to vote tomorrow on these resolutions, because they are not the kind of

resolutions that are constructive in this debate. I was hoping, and I

proposed to our leadership and I am going to propose to the Committee

on Rules, as I did to the Committee on International Relations today,

that tomorrow we postpone the actual vote on these resolutions until

next week, to give a delegation of this body a chance to reach out with

our Russian colleagues to see whether or not we can come to agreement

on a common agenda for peace that maintains and retains the dignity of

NATO and the United

States, and also allows Russia to play that critical role in leveraging

Milosevic and the Serbs to come to the table.

I am confident that we can do that, Madam Speaker, because I

understand the intensity of the Russians in their conversations with

me. And I understand the fact that they are talking to some of

Milosevic's most senior advisers, people who are helping to fund his

regime in Belgrade, people who are supporting him politically. They now

have come to the belief that we have to find some common way out of

this situation, short of a continuation of this massive aerial assault

and, eventually, the insertion of American and allied troops in what

will be a costly and bloody ground war.

Madam Speaker, we should not lose this opportunity. The Russians have

come to the table. I think we should take them up on this initiative.

Now, some would say, wait a minute; on Saturday Chernomyrdin was sent

to Belgrade to discuss with Milosevic the terms of a possible

settlement. We welcomed that, Madam Speaker. That was critically

important. And, in fact, when I talked to Ryshkov I asked about that,

and he said that Chernomyrdin was entirely supportive of the efforts of

the Duma to work with us to continue to explore common ground. In fact,

he also said that not only was Chernomyrdin supportive, but also

supportive of the leader of the Communist faction Seleznyov; an

unbelievable opportunity to bring all the factions together to try to

find a common solution.

Those who follow Russia understand that Yeltsin right now is very

unpopular. His popularity in Russia is below 10 percent. He only hangs

onto his title but does not enjoy the broad-based support of the

Russian people. Our administration, Madam Speaker, has been working for

the last 7 years and up until this day with the Yeltsin government,

with Chernomyrdin. Our initiative does not just stop with the Yeltsin

government. We bring in all the other factions: the Communist faction,

the Yablako faction, the Nosh Dom faction, the People's Power faction,

the agrarians, the regional faction, and even the LDPR, and we present

a broad-based coalition of the future of Russia. Not the past of

Russia, not the Yeltsin government, which is on its way out this year,

but the future of Russian government, those parties from where the

leadership of Russia will come in the elections to be held later this

year.

Our goal is to engage that new group of leaders to find a way that we

can come together that retains the dignity of NATO and the dignity of

our government. This was not, in any stretch of the imagination, an

attempt to undermine the hard work being done by this administration.

And I applaud the efforts that are now underway and the recent visit,

after our meeting on Thursday with Strobe Talbott, the deployment of

Strobe Talbott to Moscow over the weekend, where he has held meetings

with Chernomyrdin.

What I am saying, Madam Speaker, is that this Congress can play and

should play a legitimate role. We have an opportunity that we must not

let pass by, and I would ask our colleagues to rise up with one voice

to both Democrat leaders and Republican leaders and say the time for

partisanship is over. We have a bipartisan opportunity, with Democrats

and Republicans working together, to reach out to our colleagues in the

Duma of all factions and find common ground to let the Russians exert

their leverage over Milosevic to end this crisis in a peaceful way.

I see my good friend and colleague has arrived. He was one of those

that I first went to last week after I went to the gentleman from

Maryland (Mr. Hoyer) and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. Murtha).

The third Democrat that I approached was the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr.

Neil Abercrombie). He had just returned from Kosovo. He knew the

situation firsthand. I value his judgment and his respect among his

colleagues, not just on his side but in the entire Congress.

I wanted the gentleman from Hawaii involved. Along with the gentleman

from Hawaii, I approached the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. Rod

Blagojevich), and I did so because the Chicago Democrat is the only one

I know of with an ethnic Serbian heritage. I felt it was critically

important to have him involved in this effort as well. And I also

approached the gentleman from New York (Mr. Maurice Hinchey) because he

had accompanied me on a trip to Russia in December and I was impressed

with his willingness to work with the Russians.

These were the five Democrats I approached, Madam Speaker, before I

approached even one Republican. This was an attempt at bipartisanship,

and I hope that we can continue to build momentum, to show the world

that we do not want this to end up in war but we do want to resolve

this conflict peacefully.

Madam Speaker, I yield to my good friend and colleague from Hawaii.

Absolutely.

In fact, the gentleman is absolutely

correct. As I mentioned at the outset, this initiative was supported

initially by both Speaker Gingrich and the minority leader, the

gentleman from Missouri (Mr. Gephardt), and has had the highest support

of the senior leadership of the Russian Duma, Speaker Seleznyov. There

was an exchange of letters and a formal process established.

The gentleman from Maryland (Mr. Hoyer), is the Democrat co-chair; I

am the Republican co-chair. We have met on a regular basis, twice a

year, once in Russia, once in this country, and we have discussed

serious issues that in some cases are really issues involving our two

foreign affairs agencies in operations or issues involving the

presidents.

Our role has never been to try to give the impression that we were

speaking for anyone other than ourselves in that relationship.

In fact, I would say to the gentleman

that not only is that the case and that that has been our mission, I

can provide for the record to any Member who would so choose,

statements from former Secretary of Defense Perry, current Secretary of

Defense Cohen, current Ambassador for the U.S. in Moscow, Jim Collins,

and a whole host of other people who have issued praise for the work

that we have undertaken in building long-term, more stable

relationships because of our efforts.

In fact, when the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. Hoyer) and I met with

Strobe Talbott, he spent 10 minutes of that discussion praising us for

the work that we have been doing, telling us how important that work is

for his job at the State Department in negotiating with Russia, telling

us how important it is for the President to have a supporting

congressional group.

In fact, during the Gore-Chernomyridin Commission of 5 years ago,

when we established this, it was Vice President Gore and Victor

Chernomyrdin who had us stand alongside them, and said we are proud to

see the formation of a formal working relationship because it is so

critically important for solving the long-term problems we face.

And a further example of our efforts in the area of relations

involving foreign affairs was when the Russian Duma did not support

President Clinton's bombing of Baghdad and the bombing of Saddam

Hussein.

I agreed on behalf of the administration to travel to Moscow and to

meet with Duma deputies as a citizen and as a parliamentarian to

convince them of why I was supporting the President. I was not there to

negotiate. I was there to convince them of the President's position.

And when they came over to America, Luhkin chaired a six-member

delegation from the Duma from all factions. The first stop he made

after he landed at Dulles Airport was in my office. They spent 2 hours

one night, where I dialogued with them, I showed them evidence, and I

tried to convince them of the reason why I, as a Republican, supported

the President and his position in dealing with Saddam Hussein.

So anyone that would somehow misconstrue what we are doing can be

totally refuted by the facts.

Madam Speaker, in fact, I would tell my

colleague not only is he true and correct, but when I led a delegation

in December to Moscow for our part of the exchange, we were the first

western Democratic parliament to be taken into the Duma chambers while

they were in session, not something that would never happen in this

body because of our House rules.

The Speaker of the Duma who was conducting this session with the Duma

members in attendance, and they seat 450 in that auditorium, saw us up

in the balcony, stopped the proceedings, and announced that up in the

balcony were the Democrat and Republican Members of the American

Congress who were working together with the Duma deputies to find

common solutions to common problems.

The Duma then gave us a standing ovation and stopping their

proceedings in acknowledging our presence and the importance of our

work.

Absolutely. In fact, my good friend and

colleague knows my reputation. I am one of Russia's strongest critics.

In fact, it was not too long ago I was on this floor offering a bill

strongly opposed by the administration that would in fact require us to

deploy a national missile defense.

Many of our colleagues felt that this

would endanger our relationship with Russia.

I am at one and the same time Russia's strongest critic on

proliferation, on transparency, on strategic relationships. But I also

consider myself their best friend.

The Russians believe in strength, consistency, and candor. When we

are strong with them, when we are consistent, and when we are candid

they want to work with us. Our relationship with the Russians has been

built on that. And the reason why this is so critically important gets

back to that first series of phone calls that were made to me.

Our Russian friends, the pro-Western leaders, were pleading with me

saying, ``Curt, you have to understand what is happening here. We have

not seen the hostility toward America this bad since pre-1991. We are

hearing people in the Duma who have been our friends say nasty things

about America and are driving us to support the nationalists who are

calling for more aggressive action on Russia's part.''

They said, ``You have to understand America. We are going to have our

parliamentary elections this year. If this continues, you may well

drive Russia into electing an entirely communist Duma and perhaps a

reactionary leader of our country. That is the worst thing you want in

America.''

What they said is, ``You have to assist us, help us find a way as

supporters of our western involvement, as people who want to have

stronger ties with your country, help us find a way to find that middle

ground that lets you have the dignity you need and comes out with the

kind of effort that you want to come out of this through NATO's

negotiations but also lets us have a plan that we can convince

Milosevic that he must accept.''

That was the kind of message that was given to me by the Duma

deputies who pleaded 3\1/2\ weeks ago for us to reach out with them and

try to find this common solution.

Absolutely. To get to the first point of

the gentleman, the blame game has got to end. This should not be a

time, with American troops in harm's way, that we pick partisan fights

back and forth over who can blame the other side the most. We are where

we are.

And I would say to the gentleman, I would say that probably 99, if

not all of our colleagues, 99 percent of them agree with us that the

end game is the same for all of us. We all think that Milosevic's

activities have been outrageous. In fact, many of us think he should be

held for war crimes that are being committed by the Serbs.

We all feel that this conflict must be ended while keeping the

dignity and the coordination of NATO intact. We all want to have the

reputation of the U.S. intact. Our end results that all of us want are

the same. The question is, how do we get there?

Do we continue this massive aerial bombing campaign? Do we allow

ourselves to slide into a ground war which could pose a direct

confrontation between NATO and the U.S. and Russia, which would be

dangerous, or do we try to find out using whatever means we have to

figure if there is an alternative?

We have a means that no one else has, and that means was established

5 years ago. We did not approach the Russians. The Russians came to me

3 1/2 weeks ago and they pleaded with me to reach out to see if we

could find a new way. And in doing this, and I want to repeat this, I

talked to no Member of the Republican party. Every contact I had for

the 3 weeks that I was talking to the Russians in over 20 conversations

and exchanges of information were with leaders from the administration,

the intelligence community, the Security Council, or Members of the

other side.

It was not until last week that I spent 5 minutes briefing the

gentleman from New York (Mr. Gilman) and then I briefed the Speaker of

the House. They were the only two Republicans.

Absolutely, totally correct. Nothing else

can be inferred from what we are doing. No one should raise the issue

of armchair secretaries of State because that is not what we are about.

If we reach a conclusion in our discussions over the weekend with our

Russian colleagues that they feel Milosevic will accept, we then have

to come back and convince our Government that this is, in fact,

something that they too can live with. That is not our call as to

whether or not they will accept it. That is up to our Government to

decide the ultimate position of the U.S.

But we do have the right as parliamentarians to negotiate with our

counterparts along the lines of what we think will work but also what

we think our administration would accept. If they do not accept it,

that is their choice. If they do, all of us are better.

In fact, when I had originally planned to go over there, I had

offered to take an employee of the State Department with me. Andre

Lewis works with Steve Sestanovich and he was going to go with us so we

would have a State Department spokesperson there.

I even went as far to say this to Strobe Talbott. I said, ``If we go

ahead with this, you script out what you want us to say and we will

read your words.'' There was never an attempt to try to usurp the

authority of the executive branch to do its job. We are simply using

contacts that we have to go a different route.

And the reason why this is so important: For the past 7 years, the

relationship between Russia and the U.S. has been primarily based on

two people, the two presidents, Clinton and Yeltsin. And that was great

when Yeltsin was strong. Yeltsin is no longer strong. And yet we did

not pursue the other power centers in Russia the way we should have.

We did in our relationship. And our strength is in those other power

centers, in those other factions who will provide the future leadership

of Russia. And that is why what we are doing is so important because it

complements the discussions that are being held between the White House

and the Yeltsin, Primakov, Chernomyrdin effort in Moscow.

Absolutely.

The gentleman is absolutely correct. In

fact, as he well knows, we had our first kind of like organizational

meeting this evening at 7 o'clock or 8 o'clock down in the HC-6 room.

We agreed that tomorrow night, we would have a second meeting and we

would welcome

any of our colleagues from either party to come in and sit down with us

as we strategize the way to move forward. In fact, I would ask, Madam

Speaker, to insert in the Congressional Record this Dear Colleague memo

that I sent to every one of the 435 House Members today which outlines

in detail exactly what we have done up until now.

The text of the memo is as follows:

I would encourage my good friend to invite those from his side and I

will invite those from my side to join us in this effort. I think not

only can we play a role in engaging the Duma to show them that we

appreciate their good work, but hopefully to find a commonality between

us. But I think by doing this, we send the signal to both the

administration and other nations that we want to find a way to resolve

this conflict that leaves respect for all of us and for NATO.

I called some of the NATO governments today, Greece, Italy, Germany.

I told you about the Ukraine statement of President Kuchma, trying to

ascertain what their feelings are. Surprisingly, many of our allies

also want to retain the strength and dignity of NATO but also want to

see the kind of efforts that we are doing succeed. They do not want to

see this under any circumstance result in a ground war that causes

significant loss of life and could well lead to a world conflict

because of the potential confrontation of the U.S. with Russia. I think

we are on the right track. We know where we are going. This is not some

radical effort. I could have gone over to Belgrade on Sunday. I did not

have to have the permission of our government.

I thank my colleague and friend for

yielding.

I would just say that we could have gone that route. We could have

gone into Belgrade. We could have done that as other people have done

and as people are doing right now. Jesse Jackson, I understand, is over

there right now without the support of this government. We did not do

that. We chose the constructive route. We will continue that route.

I just want to say in closing, I want to thank my friend and

colleague for his effort, because he has received criticism on his side

as I have on mine. In the end we know we are doing the right thing.