Mr. President, I have

asked for this time today to address

two serious and interrelated concerns:

One, the President’s plans to intervene

in Kosovo; and, two, the already evident

crisis in readiness of the U.S.

military.

There are some who believe that

these two concerns should be dealt

with separately. Some may argue that

linking the two is merely an excuse for

U.S. inaction. I wish to be very clear.

Developments in Kosovo may compel

the United States and our allies to intervene.

However, this intervention

should not be paid for by further

hollowing out of the Armed Forces.

I and many of my colleagues, will not

support airstrikes in Kosovo, and especially

a ground force presence, unless

the President agrees to submit a budget

that addresses the related readiness

and operational tempo requirements of

the U.S. military.

Also, we must be careful not to believe

that there is an easy or inexpensive

long-term solution to the problems

in Kosovo. The administration would

have us believe that NATO airstrikes

will somehow solve the problem. I, and

many colleagues, disagree.

The recent massacre of ethnic Albanians

in two small villages in Kosovo

has heightened awareness and condemnation

of Serbian aggression. Powerful

airstrikes and military action

could send a strong and unambiguous

message to the Serbian leader. As in

Bosnia, empty threats of NATO action

never does anything to get the job

done.

There is good reason to be concerned

about 400,000 Albanians forced from

their homes as winter approaches. I am

concerned. I am deeply concerned

about that. But I am more concerned

about involving U.S. lives in ill-conceived

military campaigns. I am deeply

concerned that we will be sending an

already weary and overextended military

into a situation for which there is

no quick and easy solution.

Mr. President, as you know, the U.S.

defense budget has declined for the

past several years. At the same time,

nontraditional deployments have

stretched an already extended military

force to its limits. This is largely the

result of downsizing of our force structure

while increasing the number and

the frequency of deployments overseas

for purposes other than a war.

We have been asking our Armed

Forces to do more with less for several

years. They are finally admitting that

they cannot do more with what the

President has given them. Yet, the administration

is asking them to still do

more.

Now I and many of my colleagues

wish to ask the administration one

question: Will you do more? Will you

ensure that readiness does not suffer

further? Will you stop the hollowing

out of our military forces?

Some may think that this readiness

issue isn’t real. I am sure there are

those who think that there is no crisis

in readiness. Well, I believe that a few

examples of the crisis in readiness are

absolutely persuasive.

Here are just a few of the symptoms

of this crisis:

One, Navy pilot retention has sunk to

an all-time low of 10 percent. This is

the lowest in recorded history of pilot

retention programs.

Air Force pilot retention is at 30 percent,

and it is projected to decline further.

The Air Force is now 700 pilots

short.

The aircraft deployed on primary,

peacekeeping deployments—such as

Bosnia—are being ‘‘cannibalized,’’

meaning, they are being stripped for

spare parts to keep at least a few flying.

It is not uncommon for this to

happen at a low-priority unit in the

United States; however, allowing this

to happen in the front-line deployments

like Bosnia where we might soon

go into combat is inexcusable.

Aircraft carriers are being deployed

with personnel slots empty. A recent

report has one carrier on a peacekeeping

mission with a crew that is lacking

1,000 persons to perform the essential

tasks. In other words, the United

States has aircraft carriers on missions

that are lacking about 20 percent of

what is considered a full crew. How

ready are these carriers to perform

their missions?

We have Army units arriving for critical

combat training at the Army’s national

training center in California

with mechanics and ‘‘mounted’’ infantry

simply missing. These units have

junior noncommissioned officers filling

roles traditionally filled by senior experienced

noncommissioned officers.

This is a problem that permeates

every branch of the Armed Forces. We

simply are not retaining the seasoned,

well-trained military personnel and

professionals. I and Senator STEVENS

are commissioning an important study

by GAO to find out exactly why our

military persons are leaving the service

in unprecedented numbers.

The troops that I personally visited

in the Persian Gulf made it clear that

morale is low there. They are tired of

constantly being separated from their

families. I believe this separation

would be tolerable if the operational

tempo required of them were humane.

I believe the separation would also be

eased, if they were assured that their

families had adequate housing and food

on the table.

I believe the separation would be tolerable

and their loyalty to the military

secure, if it weren’t for the fact that

they also question the purpose of the

missions.

Mr. President, I believe we are failing

own soldiers on all counts.

That brings us to the question of

money. There is simply not enough

money in the defense budget as it is

currently projected to do everything

that needs to be done. There is an effort

underway to provide emergency

supplemental funding for military

readiness. I support that effort. However,

this will not solve the bigger

problems.

The U.S. defense budget has been in a

constant decline since 1985. In the case

of Bosnia, the administration has relied

on Congress to repeatedly supply

‘‘emergency supplemental’’ moneys to

provide for a ‘‘contingency’’ operation

that started in December, 1995. We are

currently supporting over 8,000 troops

in Bosnia, and the President persists in

asking us to join him in a charade that

the U.S. presence in Bosnia is an ‘‘unforeseen

emergency.’’

The budget shortfalls are eroding

readiness, but, more importantly, they

are contributing to a precipitous decline

in the moral of the soldiers in

uniform.

Mr. President, we believe it would be

an unacceptable policy to send our

troops into harm’s way without addressing

the scarcity of spare parts and

relevant readiness issues that currently

permeate the forces. Of course, I

am not prepared to support the half

baked, not thought through ideas that

I fear are still being contemplated by

this administration for what currently

serves as our ‘‘policy’’ in Bosnia and

Kosovo.

We must send a clear signal to the

administration that we will not paint

ourselves into another Bosnia, especially

without the administration’s assurance

that our military will not once

again be asked to do more with even

less.

Before we commit American lives to

another dangerous mission overseas,

we must clearly define our objectives

and be realistic in the commitment required

to achieve them. More importantly,

we must give our men and

women in uniform sufficient assurance

that their loyalty is not a one-way

street. This can only be achieved by

stopping the decline in defense budgets

and ensuring a higher quality of life for

our soldiers.

I am pleased to be joined by the distinguished

Senator from Texas in these

remarks this morning.

I yield the floor.