Mr. Speaker, I also

rise in strong support of this resolution

and yield myself as much time as I

may consume.

I am pleased to support this resolution

that adds the House’s voice to the

chorus of condemnation from the administration

and our European allies

to the provocative actions taken in recent

weeks by the Russian Federation

against the Republic of Georgia.

I commend my distinguished colleague,

Representative WEXLER of Florida

and chairman of the European Subcommittee,

for promptly introducing

this important resolution.

For several years, the Russian Government

has promulgated policies that

have increasingly sought to undermine

the sovereignty of the Georgian Government

and its territorial integrity

over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Such

harmful policies include awarding residents

in these regions with Russian

citizenship, Russian passports, and

even the right to vote in Russian elections.

In addition, the Kremlin has assigned

Russian officials to hold positions in

the separatist governments in South

Ossetia and Abkhazia. It has also provided

military equipment and volunteer

fighters to support militias active

in these regions. Such behavior is

counterproductive to efforts to find a

peaceful resolution to these conflicts

and contrary to Russia’s commitments

to international peacekeeping.

Irritated by international recognition

of Kosovo’s independence despite

its objections and incensed by Georgia’s

clear future in NATO, Russia escalated

its dangerous actions towards

Georgia in the weeks leading up to and

immediately following NATO’s Bucharest

Summit. On March 6, Russia withdrew

from the sanctions regime imposed

on Abkhazia in 1996 by the Commonwealth

of Independent States

thereby eliminating the remaining limits

on direct Russian economic relations

with Abkhazia.

On March 21, the Russian Duma

passed a nonbinding declaration asking

the government to consider the ‘‘expediency

of recognizing the independence

of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.’’ On

March 25, Dmitry Medvedev, Russia’s

incoming president, spoke out against

NATO membership for Georgia. During

the NATO Summit, Russian President

Putin sent letters to the separatist

leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia

to express his support for their regimes.

As outlined in this resolution, President

Putin instructed his government

on April 16 to establish official ties

with these separatist regimes. He further

ordered his government to recognize

legal documents issued by these

authorities as well as legal entities

registered by them. The tension

reached its climax on April 20 when an

unarmed and unmanned Russian reconnaissance

aircraft was shot down over

Georgian territory, reportedly by a

Russian MIG–29 fighter. Despite Russian

claims of innocence, neither the

Georgians nor the Abkhazian rebels

have this plane in their fleet.

Last week Russia further strained relations

by moving an extra contingent

of troops into Abkhazia. The Kremlin

claims to be responding to a Georgia

military buildup along the border,

which the Tbilisi Government denies.

Although Russia’s troop level remains

within the 3,000 soldier limit allowed

under the 1994 U.N. ceasefire agreement,

NATO has backed Russia’s assertion

that any increase must be approved

by all parties.

Such hostile actions are in stark contrast

to the recent attempts made by

Georgian President, Mikheil

Saakashvili, to find a peaceful and

lasting solution to this conflict in the

Caucasus. As he rightly stated, ‘‘There

are no issues that we and the

Abkhazians cannot solve through negotiations.’’

On March 28 and April 12, President

Saakashvili introduced new proposals

to facilitate a resolution to the conflict.

They included international guarantees

of Abkhaz autonomy, broad political

representation for the Abkhaz,

the right to veto legislation related to

the constitutional status of Abkhazia

as well as its language and culture, and

the establishment of a joint Free Economic

Zone in the Gali region. President

Putin has turned a deaf ear to

these suggestions.

I ask my colleagues to join me in

calling on the Russian Federation to

revoke immediately its decision to establish

official ties with these regions

and to support the territorial integrity

of Georgia’s borders.

Rather than engaging in provocative

acts, President Putin should respond

favorably to President Saakashvili’s

call for active involvement by the Russian

Federation as well as the international

community to forge a peaceful

and lasting solution to this conflict.

Furthermore, NATO should uphold

its Summit promise to Georgia of a future

in the Alliance by considering the

extension of a Membership Action Plan

at its December meeting. This act

would welcome the country into the

Euro-Atlantic community and could

serve as a deterrent to further Russian

aggression. I strongly support this resolution

and urge my colleagues to join

me.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of

my time.