Mr. Speaker, as we approach the NATO summit in Washington

this weekend, I would hope that this will be a somber occasion for

serious reflection about the issues of war and peace that confront us.

It seems clear that the crisis in Kosovo is nearing a decision point.

There are reportedly some in the administration and in other NATO

governments who are contemplating the commitment of ground forces to

secure Kosovo. Before we consider such a step, and before our country

even thinks of putting more Americans in harm's way, it is essential

that we stop, pause for reflection and examine the Kosovo crisis in

light of our vital national interests, our humanitarian obligations and

our enduring need for a more peaceful and stable world.

It would be a grave error to replace no long-term policy, which is

what I believe the administration has executed thus far, with the wrong

long-term policy. We need to carefully draw up a strategic road map of

the Balkans, a road map that gets us as quickly as possible to our

desired outcome.

The fundamental question we must answer is whether our military

intervention in a centuries-old civil war in the Balkans is likely to

be either resolved on our terms or be successful over the long term.

Make no mistake about it, this is a centuries-old conflict dating to

1389. If it could be accomplished, intervention on the ground might be

worth doing, assuming casualties could be minimized, but I have come to

the conclusion that military escalation is neither in the national

interest nor can it achieve a stable long-term peace in the region.

Those who have called for ground troops have not specified the goal.

Is it to take Kosovo, fortify it and occupy it for years, perhaps

decades, against the threat of Serbian guerilla warfare? Or should the

goal be to conquer all of Serbia, with incalculable consequences to

wider Balkan stability, our relationship with Russia and our ability to

respond on short notice to other regional flash points around the

world?

Do those who advocate such a course understand that it may take

months to properly build up such an invasion force? How much more

misery and devastation will have occurred by then? In this particular

conflict, does ratcheting up the violence serve our national interests

or, for that matter, the interests of refugees and innocent civilians?

Those who say we should pursue victory by any means necessary and at

all costs fail to answer the question, what would victory be if in the

process it brought us a bitterly hostile Russia, made even more

dangerous than the old Soviet Union by the volatile combination of

loose nukes and a restive military? Do we strengthen our national

security by potentially undoing all the good work that we have done

since the fall of the Berlin Wall in getting Russia to be a responsible

power?

The issue of the refugees is, of course, a terribly, terribly

important issue and cannot be dodged by anyone in the debate on Kosovo.

I am deeply moved by their plight. The United States has a moral

obligation to get Milosevic to withdraw his forces from Kosovo, help

return the refugees in an orderly manner and generally assist in

reconstruction.

Just as surely, we need to help Albania and Macedonia get up on their

feet economically, but we must ask ourselves whether military

escalation is the best way to achieve those goals in light of our moral

reasoning, which teaches us to preserve human life and limit material

destruction as best we can.

The problem is now bigger than Kosovo, and America should actively

encourage the mediation of a settlement before this crisis flashes over

into a wider conflict. Rambouillet was almost destined to fail because

it required the acceptance by both parties of a draft document with no

substantive changes allowed. The administration's absolute requirement

for a NATO implementation force and the probability of independence for

Kosovo after 3 years were conditions of Rambouillet that neither

Yugoslavia or any other sovereign country was likely to accept.

A realistic mediation needs the efforts of neutral parties to develop

a flexible framework to get the parties to say yes. To the objection

that mediation will never work, I say that judgment is overly

pessimistic. We will never know unless we try. Rather than seeking

opportunities to escalate the military campaign, we should be seeking

opportunities for peace. It is strategically wise to involve the

Russians, not only because of their influence with Serbia but because

we must tangibly show Boris Yeltsin and other democratic forces in

Russia that they will be rewarded, not spurned, for their efforts on

behalf of peace.

A too rigid rejection of Russian peace overtures, by contrast, would

simply strengthen extremists in Russia. Other countries such as Sweden

and the Ukraine should be encouraged to take part, and we must consult

actively with countries in the region. From Italy and Bulgaria to

Greece and to Turkey, they will have to live with any settlement in the

Balkans for decades to come.

I do not underestimate the difficulties involved, but should

Milosevic

balk, we will retain the ability to apply military pressure and

continue to apply military pressure from the air. Once a settlement is

reached, an international force may be necessary to assist the refugee

return and to oversee reconstruction. We should be more flexible about

the makeup of this force than we have been in the past. Rather than

making its composition a nonnegotiable end in itself, we should bear in

mind that the international force is the means to an end. That means to

an end is peace and stability in Kosovo, where ethnic Albanians can

live in safety and with autonomy.

World War I began in the Balkans because a great power, Austria-

Hungary, scoffed at the idea that Russia would intervene on the behalf

of its Serbian ally. The world has turned over many times since 1914,

but it could be an equally grave mistake to assume that the Russians

will remain passive indefinitely. They have already sent truck columns

carrying relief supplies to Yugoslavia, and there is public agitation

in Russia to send military equipment.

This situation is far too dangerous for the U.S. public debate to get

carried away by amateur generals in and out of public office. Many of

these people insist that the Russians are too weak to do anything about

it, precisely the error the Austrians made in 1914. There is a better

way. Who doubts that Theodore Roosevelt, one of our greatest

Presidents, knew the national interests and acted vigorously in its

behalf. Of course he did. But he also knew when military action brought

no advantage and actually weakened a Nation, when a source of regional

instability arose, such as the war between Russia and Japan, his every

instinct was to be an honest broker and mediate peace. His efforts were

rewarded with the Nobel Prize.

While we are now a party to the Kosovo dispute, we should be seen as

a supportive element in such a solution. Americans need the moral

courage to lead in peace as well as war. I have urged the President to

use the occasion of NATO's 50th anniversary summit to call for a

special meeting of the group of eight nations, the so-called G-8, to

begin a formal effort to achieve a peaceful settlement. This G-8

meeting should help initiate a framework for a diplomatic solution of

the crisis, and begin to put into place the foundation for economic

assistance to this region. Delegations from Ukraine and other affected

regional countries should also be invited to participate in the G-8

session.

I emphasize that this is not a panacea. It is only the beginning of a

long and difficult process, but it is a step our country should not be

afraid to take. The fact that negotiation is a long-term process should

be no obstacle to our trying to achieve it.

The United States can and should remain strongly engaged

internationally, because regional instability will not solve itself.

But we must choose our tools very carefully, for the stakes do not

allow failure. Power is a finite quantity. If we wantonly expend it all

over the world for every thinkable cause, we diminish ourselves.

America should carefully husband its military power. We should act

militarily only in the cases of clear national interests and always

keep an eye on the strategic end game: Protecting the American people

and using our power effectively where it will provide greater stability

and security for the world.

A mediated settlement of the Kosovo crisis may not be politically

popular at the moment, but it may look considerably wiser to us and our

children in the future.