Mr. Speaker, it seems clear that the crisis in Kosovo is

nearing a decision point. It is obvious that last weekend's NATO summit

in Washington was a watershed. Now the administration and other NATO

governments are talking openly of at least planning for the

introduction of ground troops to secure Kosovo, something that the

administration had until then denied it was even planning. Officials

are using euphemisms like ``troops in a nonpermissive environment,''

but the meaning ought to be plain.

At the same time, however, there have been high-level meetings

between U.S. and Russian officials about the substance of Russian Envoy

Viktor Chernomyrdin's mission to Belgrade over the weekend. There are

contradictory reports coming out of Belgrade and Moscow about exactly

what constitutes a basis for negotiation. The Russians are saying that

a UN-authorized force that included elements from NATO would be

acceptable to Milosevic, but Milosevic later denied he had agreed to

that. But yesterday the Yugoslavian Deputy Prime Minister insisted that

such an international force was acceptable.

NATO governments have downplayed the significance of the Russian

peace proposal. But before we consider the step of introducing ground

forces into a conflict that I believe was unwise for America to have

become militarily involved in to begin with, we ought to test such

peace proposals before we think about military escalation. Likewise,

the UN Secretary General, Koffi Annan, is scheduled to travel to Moscow

on Thursday for discussions on Kosovo. Such visits should not be

spurned or belittled if they are constructive steps, however halting

and uncertain, on the path to peace.

I strongly believe that America should seize opportunities for peace

rather than to seek opportunities to escalate the violence. We have to

honestly ask ourselves whether we would pursue the same policy if we

could turn the calendar back to March 24. Our bombing did not initiate

ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, but we have to be candid in

recognizing that it aggravated what was already a humanitarian tragedy.

An important element of the Hippocratic oath in medicine is, first, do

no harm. If U.S. policy was based on humanitarian considerations, it

has clearly failed on that score.

Having embarked on this policy, the United States has now assumed a

moral obligation to get Milosevic to withdraw his forces from Kosovo.

He should help return the refugees in an orderly manner and work with

us to generally assist in reconstruction, along with all of our allies

and friends throughout the world. Just as surely, we need to help

Albania and Macedonia economically, for they are bearing the brunt of

the refugee crisis. But we must ask ourselves whether military

escalation is the best means of achieving that. 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 usually do not specify the

goal. Is it to take Kosovo and occupy it for years, perhaps decades,

against the threat of Serbian guerrilla warfare; or should the goal be

to conquer Serbia with unforeseen consequences to wider Balkan

instability, our relationship with Russia and our ability to respond 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 and force? How much more misery and devastation will

have occurred by then, and does that serve the interests of refugees

and innocent civilians?

I am not impressed by foreign leaders who take it upon themselves to

lecture the American people about where our duty lies or how we must

not be so misguided as to slip into isolationism. This argument is

simply not warranted in light of the history of the last 50 years or in

reference to the present situation. Responsible internationalism does

not mean we must be stampeded into using force when our national

interest is not well defined and other means short of force have not

been exhausted.

I plan to offer a resolution with my colleagues, the gentlewoman from

Florida (Mrs. Fowler) and the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr.

Goodling), a resolution that would neither mandate withdrawal on the

one hand nor escalate the war and do a ground invasion on the other.

This resolution would bar the introduction of ground forces from Kosovo

and the rest of Yugoslavia. Why is such a course preferable? Because

once having initiated hostilities, even if it was a policy based on

flawed premises, we cannot simply walk away and wash our hands of the

problem. The bombing has created certain facts: for our own policy, the

perception of Yugoslavian government, and not least for the refugees.

At the same time, however, we should avoid military escalation in a

region where the only rational and durable solutions are political in

nature.

I use the term ``escalation'' with good reason, because the parallels

with Vietnam are striking. For that very reason this resolution would

prohibit ground combat operations in Yugoslavia without specific

authorization in law because the mission creep in Kosovo is similar to

U.S. force deployments in the early stages of Vietnam. Viewed through

the lens of history, our force buildup in the region and our edging

towards ground combat operations could be the prelude to another Gulf

of Tonkin incident. Members also should be aware that this resolution

specifically exempts search-and-rescue missions.

But drawing a legislative bright line between bombing and boots on

the ground is only one element of the solution. The problem is now

bigger than Kosovo, and I believe America should actively encourage the

mediation of a settlement before this crisis becomes a wider conflict.

To the objection that mediation will not work, I say we will never know

unless we, the United States, throw greater weight behind such efforts.

I do not underestimate the difficulties that are involved, but should

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

from the air. Once a settlement is reached, an international force may

be necessary to assist the refugee return and 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, peace and stability in

Kosovo where ethnic Albanians can live in safety and with autonomy.

Last week I urged the President to call for a special meeting of the

G-8 countries to begin a formal effort to achieve a peaceful

settlement. This G-8 meeting could help initiate a framework for a

diplomatic solution of the crisis and begin to put in place the

foundation for economic assistance to the region. Delegations from the

Ukraine and other affected regional countries could also be invited.

Such a meeting is only the beginning of a long and difficult process,

but it is a step our country should not be afraid to take.

I am pleased that the President appears to be responding positively.

This week Strobe Talbott, the Deputy Secretary of State, was dispatched

to Moscow for discussions on Kosovo, and I hope that these talks are a

prelude to the heads of governments of the affected countries making a

concerted effort at a political settlement.

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

for failure. I believe America needs to draw a careful balance between

our military and diplomatic efforts. Right now there is an imbalance in

favor of military means. While maintaining the option of military

pressure from the air, we should avoid boots on the ground or rather

boots in a Balkan quagmire. That is why the Fowler-Kasich-Goodling

resolution is the right approach and deserves the support of this

House. In the longer term, however, we should seek opportunities for a

lasting and enforceable political settlement.