Good evening. In recent weeks, faced with

a deepening and dangerous crisis in Kosovo,

the United States has worked to stop the violence

and repression and put the people of

Kosovo on the path to peace.

Last month the United Nations Security

Council, through Resolution 1199, demanded

that President Milosevic implement

a cease-fire, withdraw the forces he has recently

sent to Kosovo and garrison the rest,

allow refugees to return to their villages, give

immediate access to humanitarian relief

agencies, and agree to a timetable for autonomy

negotiations with the Kosovar Albanians.

President Milosevic has not yet complied

with the international community’s demands.

Given his intransigence, the 16 members of

NATO have just voted to give our military

commanders the authority to carry out airstrikes

against Serbia. This is only the second

time in NATO’s history that it has authorized

the use of force—and the first time in the

case of a country brutally repressing its own

people.

The international community is now prepared

to act. But as I have said from the

beginning, we would prefer to resolve this

crisis peacefully, rather than through military

action. That is why I sent Ambassador Richard

Holbrooke on a mission to make it clear

to President Milosevic what the world expects

him to do to avert the NATO airstrikes.

Ambassador Holbrooke has reported to

me, and in the past few hours to NATO, that,

faced with a solid international front, President

Milosevic has made a series of commitments.

If fully implemented—and that is a

critical and very big ‘‘if’’—these commitments

could achieve the international community’s

objectives as stated in the United

Nations resolution.

In light of President Milosevic’s pledges

and the independent verification system that

will be established, NATO has agreed to

delay action for 96 hours.

President Milosevic has agreed, first, to

fully comply with U.N. Security Council Resolution

1199. Second, he has accepted an intrusive

international inspection to verify compliance.

Third, he has agreed to a timetable

for completing interim autonomy arrangements

with the Kosovar Albanians.

If these commitments are met, and the

international community will be able to see

for itself whether they are met, they could

provide the basis for peace and progress.

All along our objectives have been clear:

to end the violence in Kosovo which threatens

to spill over into neighboring countries

and to spark instability in the heart of Europe;

to reverse a humanitarian catastrophe

in the making as tens of thousands of homeless

refugees risk freezing or starving to death

in the winter; and to seek a negotiated peace.

But let me be very clear: Commitments

are not compliance. Balkan graveyards are

filled with President Milosevic’s broken

promises. In the days ahead, we will focus

not only on what President Milosevic says,

but on what we see that he does through

a robust on-the-ground and in-the-air verification

system.

I hope that the commitments President

Milosevic has made can create a peaceful way

forward. That has been our preference all

along. But together with our NATO partners,

we will determine whether President

Milosevic follows words with deeds. And we

will remain ready to take military action if

Mr. Milosevic fails to make good on his commitments

this time.

As we approach the next century, we must

never forget one of the most indelible lessons

of this one we’re about to leave, that America

has a direct stake in keeping the peace in

Europe before isolated acts of violence turn

into large-scale wars. Today determined diplomacy

backed by force is creating the path

to peace.

I want to thank Mr. Holbrooke; I want to

thank Secretary General Solana and our

NATO allies for all the contributions they

have made. Now we must and we will do

what is necessary to see that that path to

peace is followed.

Thank you very much.