



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on April 14, 2011

In Libya, as in Iraq, “End of Combat” Means “More Combat”

Truth, it has been said, is the first casualty of war. The latest evidence of the veracity of this saying: The United States supposedly stopped attacking Libya on April 4, yet since that time U.S. aircraft have continued to fly over the beleaguered nation and assault its air defenses.

Back on March 31, Defense Secretary Robert Gates (left) [told](#) the House Armed Services Committee, “We will not be taking an active part in strike activities [after turning over the lead to NATO] and we believe our allies can sustain this for some period of time.” The United States, he said, was moving into a “support role,” assisting NATO with “electronic warfare, aerial refueling, lift, search and rescue and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support.”



Nine days after the U.S. supposedly became a mere supporting player, [Reuters reported](#) that “[11] U.S. aircraft have flown 97 sorties in Libya since April 4 and fired on air defense targets three times, the Pentagon said.”

Pentagon spokesman Col. Dave Lapan [told](#) reporters that U.S. aircraft are being used for “not just aerial refueling, not just surveillance” but also “suppression of enemy air defenses.” This would seem to contradict Gates’s description of the “support” mission as well as his department’s previous assertion that “it would not conduct strike sorties after April 4 without a specific request from” NATO, as Reuters put it.

In Washington, however, (as in Orwell's *1984*) words usually mean the opposite of their dictionary definitions. Thus, the Pentagon, says Reuters, “clarified on Wednesday that this did not apply to attacks on Gaddafi’s air defenses, which have continued.” In other words, “not conduct[ing] strike sorties” actually means “conducting strike sorties.” This explains why Pentagon Press Secretary Geoff Morrell was able to say with a straight face: “It is completely consistent with how we have described our support role ever since the transition to NATO lead.”

Contra Morrell, it is completely inconsistent not only with Defense Department pronouncements but also with the words of the President himself. On March 22, Obama, referring to the post-transition role of the U.S. military, said, “When this transition takes place, it is not going to be our planes that are maintaining the no-fly zone.” Yet a military official told Reuters that the sorties and strikes that have occurred since the transition “are defensive missions that are simply to protect the aircraft flying the no-fly zone.” Furthermore, as [NBC News noted](#), “The revelation [of the ongoing strikes] appears to



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contradict President Barack Obama's claim that the combat portion of the Libyan operation would be handed over to NATO 'within days, not weeks.' "

Obama's unconstitutional war, therefore, continues apace, with no end in sight. The United States remains in a combat role, enforcing a no-fly zone (itself an act of war) against a country that did not threaten it. The air campaign "has caused rather than broken a military stalemate" in Libya, [according to Reuters](#), leading Gen. Carter Ham, head of the U.S. African Command, to [suggest](#) that ground troops might be needed to bring a resolution to the conflict.

Diligent students of history and strict defenders of the Constitution will likely advocate that Congress exercise its constitutional authority to [end this war](#) before it turns into the proverbial quagmire.

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