



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on April 10, 2011

General Says Boots on the Ground May Be Needed in Libya

Ham's statement comes as press reports from Libya indicate that the NATO airstrikes have prevented a quick Gadhafi victory and instead [created a long, bloody stalemate](#) in the Libyan civil war. Moreover, NATO now concedes that current airstrikes can't tip the military balance. "NATO is in command of the military mission, but we know there can be no purely military solution to this crisis," NATO Spokesperson Oana Lungescu [said](#) in an April 8 NATO press conference.



AFRICOM released a vaguely worded statement on April 7 indicating that they might send in ground troops if given the command. "The Command is prepared to respond in a variety of ways pending National decisions. We will maintain our steady focus on security cooperation with our African partners, and stand ready to protect American lives and interests," AFRICOM's "Posture Statement" stipulated. The posture statement failed to elaborate on what "national decisions" it was awaiting or what "variety of ways" that it was considering.

Ham's remarks appear to contradict statements last month by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. "There will be no American boots on the ground in Libya," Gates [promised](#) in congressional hearings March 31. He even [added](#), responding to a question about whether there could be ground troops in the future: "Not as long as I'm in this job." Gates claimed that coalition military operations in Libya are not directly aimed at ending the regime of Moammar Gadhafi, though he conceded that U.S. efforts would help toward that end. "In my view," Gates [said](#), "the removal of Colonel Qaddafi will likely be achieved over time through political and economic measures and by his own people."

Ham's remarks prompted an April 8 *Washington Times* [editorial](#) that predicts ground troops in Libya:

The siege of Libya's third largest city of Misrata threatens to become a catastrophe. Food, water and medical supplies for the city's 300,000 people are running short. Qaddafi forces are fighting a bloody unconventional urban battle for the city that cannot effectively be stopped by air strikes alone. Hundreds have been killed or wounded. The North Atlantic Council is looking into ways to lift the siege, but absent ground forces, it's unclear what can be done.

While U.S. commanders have made unprovable claims about having "saved" thousands of Libyans from massacres by Moammar Gadhafi's forces, the proven "collateral damage" of civilian deaths from NATO airstrikes has mounted. NATO released a statement April 8 expressing "regret" for an airstrike carried



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out against rebel forces' tanks in Brega. And last month the Catholic bishop in Tripoli released a statement condemning NATO for airstrikes in Tripoli that killed some 40 civilians. In short, the prolonged stalemate created by NATO airstrikes may turn out bloodier than the massacres Gadhafi may have committed had the U.S. and NATO never intervened in the first place.

Meanwhile, European nations are also making contingency plans for ground operations in Libya. Germany has lined up behind a possible limited ground operation under the auspices of the European Union, [according to](#) the April 8 *New York Times*. "European Union members agreed last week to back a military mission in support of humanitarian aid efforts in Libya. The mission, if requested by the United Nations, would involve the protection and evacuation of refugees and aid agencies."

Photo of Gen. Carter Ham: AP Images

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