Mr. President,

today, as the American naval aviators

in the Mediterranean wait offshore to

fly combat missions against the Libyan

Army, as marines wait for the call to

go ashore to rescue a downed pilot, or

as Air Force pilots fly combat air patrol,

we are confident that all military

orders will be met with the same professionalism

and skill we have come to

expect of our All-Volunteer Force. The

valor and loyalty of the men and

women of our Nation’s Armed Forces

have never been in question. Yet, despite

that certainty, many Americans

view our military intervention in

Libya with anxiety and uncertainty.

They are wondering why U.S. forces

are once again engaged in combat action

against an Arab regime in the

Middle East. They are wondering when

this operation will end and when their

loved ones will return. And they are

asking another reasonable question:

What is the mission?

If the American people are uncertain

as to our military objectives in Libya,

it is with good cause. The President

has failed to explain up to this point

what follows the evident establishment

of a no-fly zone over Libya as it was

originally described. Further, the

President has articulated a wider political

objective of regime change in

Libya that is not the stated objective

of our military intervention, nor is it

the mandate of the U.N. resolution the

President has used as a justification

for our military efforts there.

Now that the objective of establishing

a no-fly zone has been reached

and our NATO allies are ready to assume

the command and execution of

this mission, it is fair to ask, what is

the role of our military and military

alliance in providing support to an opposition

we are only now beginning to

understand?

These concerns and questions are

equally relevant here in the Senate and

in the Congress since it is the responsibility

of Congress to declare war, if it

is war, and, of course, to fund our military

operations.

The President stated:

Yet this latest decision was taken

without adequate consultation with

Congress or sufficient explanation to

the American people.

Since returning from South America,

the President has begun to talk in

greater detail about our involvement

in Libya. For the second time, he has

discussed our operations in and around

Libya with the congressional leadership.

Over the weekend, he devoted his

entire address to the topic, and he will

speak to the American people tonight

about our operations in Libya. All of

this is welcome and, in my view, overdue.

Before addressing what answers I

hope to hear from the President this

evening, let me address the notifications

to Congress that the President

made.

Prior to the initiation of combat activities

in Libya, the congressional

leadership received two forms of notification

of the President’s decision to

order Americans into harm’s way.

Prior to departing for his overseas trip,

the President notified the congressional

leadership of his plans to send

American forces into combat action in

a limited, discrete role to destroy the

integrated air defenses of the Libyan

Government and to enable our allies to

establish a no-fly zone over Libya. The

second notification was a written communication

as part of his responsibilities

under the War Powers Resolution.

Throughout his communications

with the congressional leadership, the

President has emphasized that the U.S.

military would not undertake ground

combat against the Libyan Army and

that the American combat role would

be limited in time, scope, and would be

used simply as a means

The President and his military advisers

and commanders have explained

that the overwhelming American capabilities

to destroy enemy air defenses,

target command-and-control structures,

jam communications signals,

and monitor the battlefield would all

be employed to allow NATO and the coalition

to assume responsibility for the

no-fly zone. It was the limited nature

of our combat role that encouraged me

that the President was acting within

his article II authorities as Commander

in Chief. And the actions by NATO over

the past few days to take over command

and responsibility for the no-fly

zone are consistent with the President’s

commitment that

Here I am reminded of the important

contribution of Secretary of Defense

Robert Gates in advising the President

since he came to office. The President

is fortunate to be able to call upon the

wisdom of this seasoned national security

expert in considering our operations

in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya.

It was Secretary Gates who reminded

the American people of the risks inherent

in military intervention. I know

his views will be critical as we transfer

further responsibilities to the coalition,

and I hope the administration

pays close attention to what he says.

This week, NATO will consider the

last part of the mission that must be

transferred. What the United Nations

resolution refers to as protection of civilian

personnel has included attacks

on Libyan ground forces and strike

missions conducted by American warplanes.

If U.S. military forces were to

have responsibility for close air support

or execute additional strike missions

in support of opposition forces,

then that, of course, would exceed the

President’s definition of a limited, supporting

role. Such a mission could last

indefinitely and would trigger congressional

consideration of our larger role

in the war.

My expectation is that the President

will explain this transfer of responsibility

in his speech tonight and that

NATO will resolve this issue this week,

ending our efforts there as the primary

force.

As the commander of U.S. African

Command, GEN Carter Ham has said:

General Ham has also said:

Nation this evening, like many Americans,

I will be listening for answers to

the following questions: When will the

U.S. combat role in the operation end?

Will America’s commitment end in

days, not weeks, as the President

promised? What will be the duration of

the noncombat operation, and what

will be the cost? What national security

interests of the United States justify

the risk of American life? What is

the role of our country in Libya’s ongoing

civil war?

The President made clear that our

combat forces’ role in Libya will be

limited in scope and duration. Tonight,

I hope he will reiterate that pledge or

ask Congress before extending the duration

or scope of our mission there.

And, as always, our thoughts are with

the brave young Americans in places

such as Helmand Province and Baghdad,

those in Japan helping the Japanese

people recover from the natural

disaster there, and with those who are

once again off the shores of Tripoli.

I yield the floor.