

in a November 1984 speech to the National Press Club. In that speech, I proposed six “tests” governing my definition of a situation requiring us to commit our forces to “combat.”⁵ Those six tests, in brief, are:

1. Our vital interests must be at stake.
2. The issues involved are so important for the future of the United States and our allies that we are prepared to commit enough forces to win.
3. We have clearly defined political and military objectives, which we must secure.
4. We have sized our forces to achieve our objectives.
5. We have some reasonable assurance of the support of the American people.
6. U.S. forces are committed to combat only as a last resort.

Thus, the answer to Jim Webb’s charge seemed to me to be clear and simple. I said we would consider that we had achieved our objective, or “won,” each time a commercial ship with non-belligerent commerce went back and forth in the international waters of the Gulf without being subjected to attack, indiscriminate or otherwise, from Iran. I also told Jim that the free movement of important commerce on international waters was vital to our security; that that freedom had been one of the cardinal principles we had supported since our foundation as a nation. Finally, I told him that we were not now engaged in “combat,” but ultimately we might be, if we did not protect the right to move freely in international waters.

Secretary Webb, incidentally, was my personal choice to be Secretary of the Navy. He is a Naval Academy graduate, and had a superb combat record as a Marine in Vietnam, displaying con-

5. See “Uses of Military Power” speech in full, in Appendix.

spicuous bravery on many occasions and great leadership at all times. He is also a brilliant novelist and author. I admired him deeply, and was sorry indeed when, in early 1988, severe budget cuts led him to conclude that he should resign.

There arose another factor complicating our mission in the Gulf. On May 17, 1987, Iraq made its mistaken missile attack on one of our destroyers, the USS *Stark*. Tragically, thirty-seven American lives were lost; and there was substantial damage to our ship. The ship was saved through the exertions, skill, and courage of her officers and men, but nothing could repair the loss of life. Iraq most certainly had made a serious mistake, but that did not and could not change our interest and that of our allies in keeping the Gulf waters open.

Iraq was clearly concerned that we understand the tragedy was an accident. Its government issued an immediate apology and condolences to families of the victims for the fearful error, and offered to pay damages and appropriate compensation. In addition, Iraq asked us to establish military-to-military meetings to work out safeguards against future problems between our forces in the Gulf. We agreed to hold meetings in Baghdad for that sole purpose. Those meetings were in no way intended to indicate that we had taken sides in the war or would assist Iraq in the war. We were merely trying to ensure that both of us avoid the danger of an accidental confrontation.

More importantly, although we did not actually change the Rules of Engagement, I told General Crist to make it abundantly clear to each of our ship commanders that each was fully supported by the chain of command in taking all reasonable steps necessary to protect his ship and the lives of his men. That included permission to shoot first (and not wait until fired upon) if the commander felt such action was required to protect his ship.

Incidentally, the *Stark* episode underlines for me the dangers of believing fully “first” reports. The first report to me on the