

US should weigh Iran attack: Lieberman

Tehran 'to retaliate if attacked from American bases in Gulf'

AP, AFP, Washington/ Kuwait City

Sen Joseph Lieberman said Sunday the United States should consider a military strike against Iran because of Tehran's involvement in Iraq.

"I think we've got to be prepared to take aggressive military action against the Iranians to stop them from killing Americans in Iraq," Lieberman said. "And to me, that would include a strike over the border into Iran, where we have good evidence that they have a base at which they are training these people coming back into Iraq to kill our soldiers."

Iran warned on Sunday that it would strike US military bases in neighbouring Gulf states if they were used as staging posts to attack the Islamic republic over its nuclear programme.

"We rule out the possibility that our neighbours... will allow the United States to use their territory in attacking Iran," Iranian parliament speaker Gholam Ali Hadad Adel told

reporters during an official visit to Kuwait.

"But if this actually happens, we will be forced to defend ourselves... We will target those bases or points" used to attack Iran, he said.

Adel said that some Gulf states, which he did not name, had assured Tehran that they would not allow their territory to be used in the event of an attack on Iran.

"Yes. Some countries in the region did," he said when asked if Gulf countries had given such assurances.

"Parliaments in some of these countries have even called for not allowing the United States to use its bases to attack Iran," said Adel, adding that this issue had not been discussed with Kuwaiti officials.

The Iranian speaker also said that Gulf states had now "learned many lessons from the US invasion of Iraq," in March 2003, and that "officials in the region are not likely to link their fate with US mistakes."

The US accuses Iran of fostering terrorism and Tehran's nuclear ambitions have brought about international reproach.

Lieberman, the Democratic nominee for vice president in 2000 who now represents Connecticut as an independent, spoke of Iranians' role in the continued violence in Iraq.

"We've said so publicly that the Iranians have a base in Iran at which they are training Iraqis who are coming in and killing Americans. By some estimates, they have killed as many as 200 American soldiers," Lieberman said. "Well, we can tell them we want them to stop that. But if there's any hope of the Iranians living according to the international rule of law and stopping, for instance, their nuclear weapons development, we can't just talk to them."

Gaza plunges into new factional fighting

AFP, Gaza City

Factional violence flared again in Gaza yesterday between Hamas and Fatah after three weeks of calm, with loyalists of the rival parties shot and flung to their deaths from high-rise buildings.

Seven people, including one civilian, have been killed in the volatile territory since the latest bout of fighting erupted on Thursday.

Egyptian mediators, who for months had been trying to calm tensions between the two sides, on Monday once again persuaded the rivals to agree to a new truce, but shots were heard after it was due to take effect.

Numerous previous ceasefires had been violated within hours of taking effect since the first major bout of factional violence erupted in December. Since then, more than 160 people have been killed.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas called for an end to the bloodshed after warning last week that the strife had left Palestinians on the brink of a civil war and was as damaging, if not more so, than

the 40-year Israeli occupation.

"What's happening in Gaza is regrettable and very harming. Both parties are working seriously with the Egyptian brothers to put an end to it," Abbas told reporters in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank.

The factional fighting in one of the world's most densely populated areas, along with renewed Israeli attacks in response to militant rockets, have threatened to sink international efforts to jumpstart the dormant Middle East peace process.

The violence has rattled the unity government that the two parties formed in March with the hope that the cabinet would put an end to the bloodshed and pave the way for an end to a crippling Western aid boycott.

The level of animosity between the rivals locked in a bitter power struggle has reached new highs after more than a year of steadily rising tensions that followed Hamas's rout of Abbas's long-dominant Fatah in a parliamentary poll in January 2006.



PHOTO: AFP
Palestinian members of the Juma family look at the debris of their home after Jerusalem municipality workers escorted by the Israeli police demolished their house in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Jabel Mukaber yesterday after its was built ten years ago without municipality construction permission.

Britain's opposition demands probe into Iraq war

AFP, London

Britain's main opposition Conservative party said it plans to call Monday for an immediate probe into the government's handling of the US-led war in Iraq.

The call is seen as an attempt to put pressure on Gordon Brown, the British finance minister who is set to take over from Prime Minister Tony Blair at the end of the month.

William Hague, the Conservative spokesman on foreign affairs, said he would use a debate in the House of Commons to push for a hearing with the power to summon officials and military commanders for questioning.

"It's very important, for instance, to find whether there are lessons that need to be applied to Afghanistan from what has happened in Iraq for the last years," Hague told BBC radio.

Britain has in the last year been

increasing its deployment of soldiers to Afghanistan, where they are fighting a resurgent Taliban, while pledging to reduce troops in Iraq.

"It's very important to start an inquiry by the end of 2007 into events that happened back in 2003, unless memories are going to have faded and many emails are going to have disappeared," Hague said.

"And I think a proper inquiry into Iraq is also essential to restoring public trust and confidence in the government or any government when it comes to take decisions about matters of this kind," he added.

Hague said the inquiry should look at the decision to disband the Iraq army and Iraq's ruling Baath party, which Washington and London accept as one of the "calamitous decisions" in the course of the occupation.

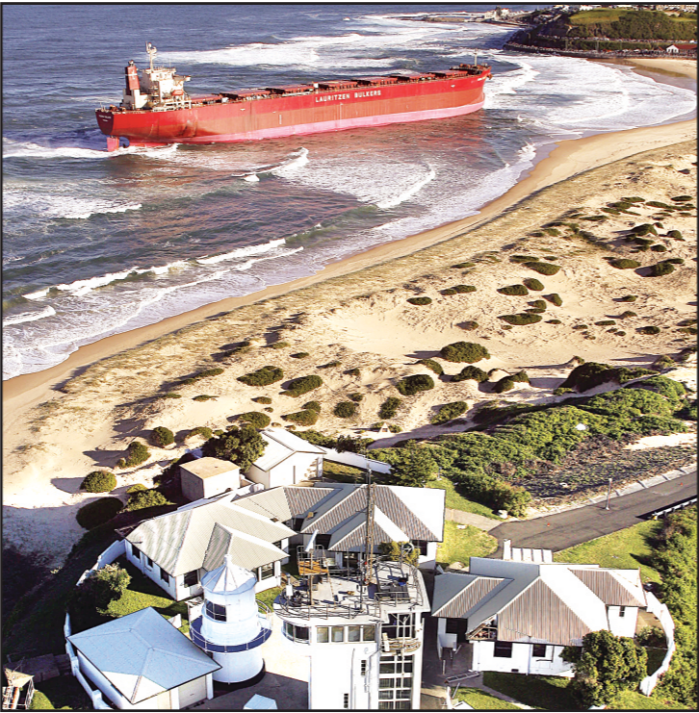


PHOTO: AFP
The 30,000-tonne bulk coal carrier 'Pasha Bulker' lies below Nobbys Lighthouse (front) after running aground during severe storms off Nobbys Beach in Newcastle, north of Sydney yesterday. Fears are mounting that the ship will break apart and spill its 700 tonnes of fuel oil onto the city's beaches.

Pak turmoil won't halt Musharraf reelection Says PM Aziz

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan's prime minister said Sunday he expects President Pervez Musharraf to secure another five years in office this fall in spite of turmoil over his bid to fire the chief justice.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz projected an air of confidence for the government and Musharraf's leadership, playing down signs of a spread in Islamic extremism in the country and predicting parliament would finish its full five-year term for the first time in the country's history.

Aziz said Pakistan's economy has grown and the country now has record reserves of \$15 billion.

"The whole nation hopes, and I'm sure President Musharraf wants, to stand for re-election. We are very sure he will contest and he will be elected for another term," said Aziz, seated in a state reception room in his official residence overlooking the capital.

Both Musharraf's and Aziz's politi-

cal futures have been thrown into question by the outpouring of opposition to the March 9 suspension of Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry, which has provoked deadly unrest and accusations of authoritarian rule by the military leader.

Last week the government announced rules to contain an increasingly critical independent media coverage, but withdrew the proposal over the weekend after scathing domestic and international reaction. In the interview, Aziz went out of his way to defend the government record in tolerating criticism.

"We believe in freedom of the press. The government is very much at peace with itself, so if people criticize us we welcome it as long as there is a code of conduct and norms of fair reporting are followed," he said. He added that the institution of the army should be spared unfair attacks.