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Monday December 17 5:19 AM ET

India Urges Self-Defense, Pakistan Vows to Retaliate

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By Sanjeev Miglani

[Reuters Photo](#)

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - India warned Monday of tough consequences for anyone daring to challenge its national security, as tensions rose with nuclear rival Pakistan over last week's bloody suicide attack on parliament.

Islamabad threatened to respond strongly if attacked, as a top Indian government minister said all options were open including striking at guerrilla bases in Pakistan.

Indian police investigators have blamed Pakistan-based guerrilla groups and its intelligence arm for the parliament assault in which 13 people, including all five intruders, died.

“Anyone who challenges our security will have to face the consequences,” Indian Home (interior) Minister Lal Krishna Advani said at a function in the Indian capital Monday.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee ([news](#) - [web sites](#)), who said at the weekend that New Delhi was reaching the limit of its tolerance of terrorism, reviewed national security at a meeting of the cabinet committee on security.

Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh told reporters that senior ministers discussed the security situation including reports of Pakistani troop movements.

“Government is alert to the security situation, PM was briefed about the Pakistani army activities in their territory,” he said when asked about Pakistan troop movement near the border.

There was no elaboration on the reported military build-up.

“The government is considering all options,” Advani told Star Television earlier said when asked if New Delhi would exercise the right to pursue militants operating from camps in Pakistan.

He is due to make a statement in parliament when it resumes its sitting Tuesday.

Islamabad said the Indian allegations of involvement in the parliament attack were fabricated and promised a tough response to any military strike.

“We will react if attacked. And will react in a very strong manner,” Pakistani media quoted Major-General Rashid Qureshi, the top spokesman for President Pervez Musharraf as saying.

“In case of attack, India should prepare for a great loss.”

India and Pakistan, which conducted nuclear explosions in May 1998, have gone to war three times since they won independence from Britain in 1947.

Two of those conflicts were over the disputed territory of Kashmir ([news](#) - [web sites](#)), which both India and Pakistan lay claim to.

The neighbors were on the brink of a fourth conflict in 1999 when hundreds of armed intruders crossed from Pakistan into the Kargil sector

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of northern Kashmir, prompting a huge military offensive by New Delhi.

PAKISTAN OFFERS JOINT INVESTIGATION

Islamabad condemned the unprecedented attack on the parliament and reiterated its offer of a joint probe.

Five men were killed by security forces when they attacked the parliament complex with guns and grenades. Eight other people died. Indian police said the intruders were all Pakistanis.

More than 300 lawmakers were in the building at the time.

“We are ready to give a firm assurance that if, on the basis of a joint inquiry, anybody based in Pakistan is found involved in the attack, we will proceed against him,” Qureshi said.

But Advani said he had doubts about Pakistan's offer and called on Islamabad to end its support of Muslim guerrillas operating in Indian administered Kashmir.

“We have doubts over their intentions. They had the temerity to suggest that the attack was engineered by Indian agencies,” the Hindu newspaper quoted Advani as saying.

Delhi police have said that the men who staged the daring attack on parliament were drawn from the Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Pure) and Jaish-e-Mohammad, two of several Pakistan-based groups operating in Muslim majority Jammu and Kashmir.

Lawmakers from Advani's fiercely nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party have demanded the government order strikes on camps that it says exist in Pakistan to train fighters in Kashmir.

Islamabad denies direct involvement in the 12-year-old insurgency against Indian-rule in Kashmir, but says it gives moral and diplomatic support to the separatists, whom it calls freedom fighters.

WAR RISK SEEN

Analysts and Indian newspaper editorials warned a military strike inside Pakistan could escalate into a full-scale war.

“The people of India must not lose sight of their situational dilemma that a heightened terror-specific war with hot pursuit and cross-border attack carries with it the danger of turning into a full scope war with Pakistan,” the Hindu newspaper said.

A retired air force officer said New Delhi would be better off launching covert operations inside Pakistan.

“Both India and Pakistan are nuclear weapons states and we cannot afford to play around with nuclear thresholds,” Kapil Kak told Reuters.

Another defense expert said cross-border strikes into Pakistan may not even be a worthwhile military option.

“It is utterly ridiculous to suggest we go across now,” said Satish Nambiar, director of the United Services Institute, a New Delhi military think tank.

“We do not even have exact intelligence on their (camps) location. This is plain rhetoric and a verbal war is being waged,” he said.

(Additional reporting in New Delhi by Surojit Gupta)

(Sanjeev Miglani, New Delhi Newsroom 91-11-301-2024; fax 91-11-301-4043;sanjeev.miglani+[reuters.com](mailto:sanjeev.miglani@reuters.com))

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