

ATTACK ON THE USS STARK

Legislators react cautiously, seek more information

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Legislators reacted cautiously yesterday to the attack on the Navy frigate USS Stark, with most House and Senate members saying they wanted more information about the details before calling for a change in U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf region.

Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said he was "assuming it was an accident, and I have no information to the contrary, that it was a very bad accident." Nunn said he had "expected a quicker response" from Iraq, such as an apology.

Nunn said the Navy should review the type of ships it has deployed in the gulf and should consider protecting them with Aegis-class cruisers, warships equipped with highly sophisticated defensive electronic systems that can track and shoot down in-

coming missiles.

Asked why the Stark didn't try to shoot down the missile, Nunn said, "my assumption is that the crew was surprised." A key question that has to be asked now is whether "we have the right kind of ships in the gulf," said Nunn.

Rep. Charles Bennett, D-Fla., said, "We ought to get all the facts before we make any decision. The main emotion, maybe the single emotion, is one of deepest thanks to those who sacrificed their lives and deepest sympathy to those who were left behind."

Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the attack "demonstrates the absolute urgency of bringing about an end" to the Iran-Iraq war.

"It also shows that we must proceed very carefully with regard to putting our ships and their crews in further jeopardy," Pell

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said.

House Speaker Jim Wright, D-Texas, declined substantive comment, telling reporters, "I think it would be wise to wait to find out what happened before I start spouting off."

Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the panel would conduct "a full review" and said he thought the State Department should seek reparations from the Iraqis.

In the House, Rep. William Dickinson, R-Ala., ranking GOP member on the Armed Services Committee, noted that the attack occurred in waters where the United States has long patrolled.

Speaking about the House debate on a Pentagon budget bill, Dickinson said, "I would like to point out the irony [that] people here will call on the United States to do something, but the same people who are calling on us to do something are the same people who vote to cut this defense budget right down to the bone and sinew and deny us the defense we need."

Rep. Robert Torricelli, D-N.J., said, "The presence of five American ships in the Per-

sian Gulf has been a tragedy waiting to happen. ... These ships have been in danger from the outset. ... The failure is not with our armed forces, nor with their equipment, but the failure is with our strategy."

Sen. Alfonse M. D'Amato, R-N.Y., said: "Because of the volatility of the Persian Gulf region, a U.S. presence in those waters is necessary for the maintenance of free passage for oil tankers and merchant ships to the rest of the world. Without the U.S. presence there, the gulf might well be closed tomorrow by either Iraq or Iran."

"We must make it very clear to both Iraq and Iran that this can never be allowed to take place again. Although no restitution can compensate for the loss of brave young men who gave their lives aboard the USS Stark, compensation must be made to their families as well as to the U.S. government for the loss of the ship."