

MONTHLY DIGEST

CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL NEWS DIGEST

Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

Volume 1, Number 2
February 2009

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NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL

Al Qaeda threatens to attack India for the first time

ET Bureau, 11 February 2009

NEW DELHI: The Al Qaeda for the first time has directly trained its guns on India, warning of a Mumbai-style attack if there is a strike on Pakistan. The support for Pakistan from the global jihad syndicate is not expected as Islamabad has been indulgent towards the efforts to make Quetta and the so-called Federally Administered Tribal Areas the incubating ground of a reorganised and protected Al Qaeda.

Using its usual style of communication, the Al Qaeda shot off the warning to India through a video that was received by the BBC in London. "India should know that it will have to pay a heavy price if it attacks Pakistan," said Mustafa Abu Al-Yazid, who is reportedly the Al Qaeda's military commander in Afghanistan and is ranked behind No. 2 Ayman al-Zawahiri. What is also being noted here is that Pakistan had claimed that Al Yazid was killed in fighting last August Bajaur tribal region in Pakistan.

In the 20-minute video, the Al Qaeda commander, speaking in Arabic, spews venom against India and its armed forces.

"The Mujahideen will sunder your armies into the ground, like they did to the Russians in Afghanistan. They will target your economic centres and raze them to the ground." The terrorists further criticised the ban on the Jamaat Ud Dawa, which was imposed after the Mumbai attacks.

Experts believe that it is this connection that has proved dangerous for India with the most recent example being the Mumbai terror attacks.

Al Qaeda in the video also targets Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari asking the people in Pakistan to rise up and overthrow the government, according to the BBC.

The Al Qaeda commander in the video is suspected to have been involved in a number of terror attacks. According to reports, he last surfaced in August 2008 to confirm the death of Al Qaeda chemical-weapons expert Midhat Mursi al-Sayid Umar.

Source: http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/News/PoliticsNation/Al_Qaeda_threatens_to_attack_India_for_the_first_time/articleshow/4109243.cms

Al-Qaeda cell killed by Black Death 'was developing biological weapons'

20 January 2009

The group of 40 terrorists were reported to have been killed by the plague at a training camp in Algeria earlier this month.

It was initially believed that they could have caught the disease through fleas on rats attracted by poor living conditions in their forest hideout.

But there are now claims the cell was developing the disease as a weapon to use against western cities.

In This Issue

Recent news reports reveal that the threat of biological weapons appears closer home, as the terror group Al-Qaeda, for the first time threatens to attack India. Regarding the preparedness measure against a potential bio terror attack the Indian government has signed off on marketing and sales plans of the BioThrax anthrax vaccine produced by a US based company. There is positive news on strengthening the chemical disarmament regime; Iraq joins the Chemical Weapons Convention on 12 Feb 2009.

Editor

Experts said that the group was developing chemical and biological weapons.

Dr Igor Khrupinov, a biological weapons expert at Georgia University, told The Sun: "Al-Qaeda is known to experiment with biological weapons. And this group has direct communication with other cells around the world.

"Contagious diseases, like ebola and anthrax, occur in northern Africa. It makes sense that people are trying to use them against Western governments."

Dr Khrupinov, who was once a weapons adviser to the Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev, added: "Instead of using bombs, people with infectious diseases could be walking through cities."

It was reported last year that up to 100 potential terrorists had attempted to become postgraduate students in Britain in an attempt to use laboratories.

Ian Kearns, from the Institute for Public Policy Research, told the newspaper: "The biological weapons threat is not going away. We're not ready for it."

Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/algeria/4294664/Al-Qaeda-cell-killed-by-Black-Death-was-developing-biological-weapons.html>

Panel experts say bio terrorism imminent

Taylor miller, 29 January 2009

On 28 January 2009, the NYU School of Law hosted a panel discussion about weapons of mass destruction and the future of terrorism.

The event, which featured members of the Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism, showcased the commission's newest report on the challenges posed by all forms of WMD - chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear - and its recommendations for the new administration's responsive action.

Among the report's most startling declarations is the prediction that at least one nuclear weapon will be detonated in the next five years. The panel members also asserted that the threat of nuclear and biological warfare to the United States is on the rise rather than decline.

Commission members including Frances Townsend, former assistant to formal President Bush for Homeland

Security and Counterterrorism, Michael Sheehan, former Deputy Commissioner for Counterterrorism at the NYPD, and Robin Cleveland, former counselor to the president of the World Bank, were present at the event.

In opening the discussion, Cleveland said a biological terror attack is much more likely than a nuclear war.

"For terrorists, biological weapons are much more easy to obtain due to the lax security of scientific laboratories and more importantly, the psychological effects of bioterrorism," she said.

Townsend believes the American government can be more effective in controlling the world's supply of WMDs if "the diffusion of accountability that currently exists in our government's bureaucracy be abolished."

Source: http://www.nyunews.com/news/university/panel_experts_say_bio_terrorism_imminent-1.1316720

NSG women terror alert

Nishit dholabhai, 11 Febraury 2009

Manesar (Haryana), Feb. 11: National Security Guard chief J.K. Dutt today warned that al Qaida could use women suicide bombers and biological weapons against India.

Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, an al Qaida leader believed to be dead, threatened in a video made public on 10 February that India could expect more Mumbai-style strikes if it attacked Pakistan.

India sees the Mumbai attacks as a convergence of al Qaida, Taliban and the Lashkar-e-Toiba.

Dutt told a seminar today that al Qaida's reported training of 80 women suicide bombers should raise the question if any of them could be sent to India. Later, the director-general linked this to the need for a bigger role for women in security agencies.

Sources said the Intelligence Bureau and Research and Analysis Wing had been alerted on these potential threats alongside warnings about possible use of biological weapons.

"The Mumbai attack was an audacious attempt by the Taliban-al Qaida-LeT combine to shape policies of three sovereign nation states that include the oldest democracy and the largest democracy," Dutt said.

The NSG chief said it was evident after the 9/11 attacks in the US that at least one group would stop at nothing. "This thought process has been reinforced with the terror attack in Mumbai on November 26, 2008," he said.

Dutt also expressed concern about the threat from biological weapons, last known to be used in 1995 in Japan when over 10 people were killed in a Sarin gas attack in a subway by a domestic terrorist group.

Source: http://www.telegraphindia.com/1090212/jsp/nation/story_10521767.jsp

Senior UN Counter-terrorism Official Visits the OPCW

Mr Mike Smith

Executive Director of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), visited the OPCW on 5 February 2009 for meetings with the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Rogelio Pfrirer, and other senior OPCW officials.

CTED was created to support the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee in its assessment, monitoring and promotion of Member States' implementation of resolution 1373 (2001). In that role it reviews the reports submitted by States, dialogues with them on aspects of implementation, and in some cases carries out field visits to assess how the counter-terrorism measures are working on the ground.

On 5 September 2008, the UN General Assembly reaffirmed the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted in 2006, which "encourages the International Atomic Energy Agency and the OPCW to continue their efforts, within their respective mandates, to help States to build capacity to prevent terrorists from accessing nuclear, chemical, or radiological materials, to ensure security at related facilities, and to respond effectively in the event of an attack using such materials."

<http://www.opcw.org/news/news/article/senior-un-counter-terrorism-official-visits-the-opcw/>

Iran accuses Israel of using chemical weapons in Gaza

18 January 2009

TEHRAN, Jan. 18 (Xinhua) -- Iran is seeking for United Nations' serious action over Israel's use of chemical weapons in Gaza, the semi-official Fars news agency reported.

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki made the accusation against Israel in a letter to UN Chief Ban Ki-moon, urging for a "serious and effective action" over Israel's use of chemical weapons in Gaza, according to the report.

"In recent attacks by the Zionist regime's troops on Gaza, the regime's army has several times used banned weapons, including dangerous, toxic materials causing painful deaths, incapacitation or physical disabilities," Mottaki was quoted as saying in the letter.

He also called the use of the chemical weapons as the "examples of war crimes."

Earlier on Tuesday, Iran's Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics also issued a statement to denounce the Israeli use of chemical weapons in Gaza, saying that "the Zionist regime" had fired "white phosphorus into Gaza."

After about three weeks of an unprecedented military air and ground offensive of Israel on Gaza since Dec. 27, where around 1,240 Palestinians killed and more than 5,200 others wounded.

Source: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-01/18/content_10678977.htm

Allegations of Israel's use of chemical weapons not yet proved: UN

23 January 09, Trend News, U.Sadigova

UN will not make premature statements, but will await the international organizations' final report on Israel's use of chemical weapons during the hostilities in Gaza, said a spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon Brenden Varma.

"Until any determination of possible crimes is made, it is premature to talk about UN follow-up action [on Israel]," Varma wrote Trend News via e-mail.

On Wednesday, the Israeli Defense Ministry confirmed the allegations of the illegal use of banned white phosphorus during the three-week offensive in Gaza against Hamas, but has not yet presented exact data. Defense Minister Ehud Barak said it had launched investigation into the numerous allegations of human rights and media organizations on the use of chemical weapons against the civilian population.

The UN has not spoken out on Israel's use of phosphoric weapons, as is awaiting the final reply of

the UN Human Rights Council, which has its own independent mandate and is probing allegations against the Israel Defense Forces, Varma said.

Arab media reported at least 200 phosphorous bombs were dropped on the Gaza Strip during the Operation Cast Lead. BBC quoted Palestinian medics as saying that 1,300 Palestinians were killed and 5,500 wounded as a result of the offensive.

The total damage is assessed at 1.5 billion dollars.

Source: <http://news.trend.az/index.shtml?show=news&newsid=1406055&lang=en>

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Oregon Firm Prepares Smallpox Drug

12 February 2009

Oregon biopharmaceutical firm Siga Technologies hopes next year to receive federal approval to distribute a new smallpox antiviral treatment, the Oregonian reported.

The company began work on the drug prior to 2001 and received an infusion of federal funding in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks. It has now received \$100 million worth of contracts from Washington.

Should the company's product, ST-246, receive authorization from the Food and Drug Administration, it would primarily be supplied to the military or placed in the Strategic National Stockpile. Hospitals or other sizable private firms might also have access to the drug.

Siga indicated this week that it would compete for a U.S. Health and Human Services Department contract to provide between 1.7 million and 12 million doses of smallpox antiviral medication.

Meanwhile, the Indian government has signed off on marketing and sales plans there of the BioThrax anthrax vaccine produced by Maryland-based Emergent BioSolutions, the company announced today.

"The government of India has been explicit in expressing its commitment to protect its population from the continuing threat of bioterrorism. We are certainly pleased that BioThrax will be a valuable countermeasure available to the government of India to achieve that goal," Emergent chief Fuad El-Hibri said in a release.

Source: http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090212_1299.php

Combat on the cutting edge Military plans to sink big bucks into high-tech gear for the battlefield

Chris Iambie, 12 February 2009

Canada's soldiers of tomorrow could have assault rifles that are lighter, share pictures and come with a central power source to charge high-tech sighting, magnification, laser aimers and grenade launchers.

And new uniforms could include tourniquet bandages and anti-microbial drugs, as well as built-in protection from chemical and biological weapons in sensitive areas where soldiers sweat.

These are some of the concepts Ottawa is spending a fortune on to make Canadian soldiers more lethal.

It issued a tender Wednesday worth about \$4.75 million for what the military calls human factors engineering support. The three-year contract is meant to usher several high-tech projects worth well over \$1 billion from the lab to the battlefield.

"Canadian soldier modernization efforts to date have resulted in dramatic improvements in the areas of soldier survivability, mobility and sustainability," says the tender. "Further efforts are now underway to achieve significant improvements in soldier lethality."

The work is meant to apply knowledge of soldiers' abilities and limitations to the design of weapons and other gear, said Maj. Linda Bossi, an ergonomics expert at Defence Research and Development Canada.

"If you don't do this, it may work in the lab, but it won't work in the mud," Maj. Bossi said in an interview Wednesday.

"So we're not just talking about better spear-chuckers or better bullet-chuckers. We're talking about network-integrated systems that are sensors and weapons."

There is one potential drawback to adding too much gear to a soldier's kit, said Terry Liston, the military's former chief of planning and operations.

"There's always a concern because the infantryman has so much stuff to carry," said Mr. Liston, a retired major-general. "It's a trade-off. If you're going to have more soldier protection, for example, you're going to severely restrict his mobility on foot."

He cautioned that better-equipped soldiers, dubbed "force-multipliers," don't trump large numbers of boots on the ground.

Making it easier for soldiers to kill people doesn't sit well with Steven Staples of the Rideau Institute, a left-leaning Ottawa think-tank.

"Any notion of the Canadian Forces, it seems to me, of excelling in excellence in peacekeeping is being replaced in an excellence in being able to kill people. This is really worrisome."

Source: <http://thechronicleherald.ca/Front/1106088.html>

Is pollution driving antibiotic resistance?

12 February 2009

Infections caused by superbugs - such as Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* known as MRSA. The media often blame over-prescription of antibiotics and poor hygiene standards, but these are just two of the reasons why bacteria now resist many antibiotics.

We have been investigating antibiotic resistance genes in bacteria living in soils, and how pollution may influence the way resistance evolves.

Bacteria have existed on Earth for at least three billion years. In this time they have evolved complex strategies to adapt to different habitats and compete with other bacteria for every available niche. One strategy involves attacking rivals with chemical weapons - which we call antibiotics. Logically, any bacterium attacking a competitor needs to protect itself and its species from its own antibiotics.

Antibiotics and other chemicals that could drive antibiotic resistance enter rivers and soils in many ways.

One strategy involves attacking rivals with chemical weapons - antibiotics.

Horizontal gene transfer has the power to drive the spread of resistance genes when bacteria are faced with antibiotics, disinfectants or other pollutants in waste from towns, cities and agriculture.

Antibiotics and other chemicals that could drive antibiotic resistance enter rivers and soils in many ways. Industry uses large volumes of detergents and disinfectants - including quaternary ammonium compounds (QACs) - known together as biocides. Nearly all domestic cleaning products and shampoos also contain QACs. They wash out in large volumes with the waste water from factories and homes. QAC resistance genes are significant because they are often located with antibiotic resistance genes on the same

piece of DNA, so exposure to one will co-select for the other.

Using molecular techniques to analyse bacteria in soils, we compared the number of integrons and genetic diversity of resistance genes in polluted samples with those from control agricultural soils. Polluted samples had a significantly higher number of integrons. We also found new genes - similar to known antibiotic resistance genes - were more numerous in polluted samples than in unpolluted control soils.

It appears that certain methods of waste disposal such as sludge and slurry application introduce genetic elements known to carry antibiotic resistance genes into agricultural soil. Further research is needed to study survival of bacteria carrying these elements in soil contaminated with waste, and the risk of transmission to people through meat and vegetables in the same way as food poisoning bacteria such as *E. coli* and *Salmonellae*.

The number of bacteria on Earth has been estimated by scientists from the University of Georgia as five million trillion trillion - if each bacterium were a penny, the stack would reach a trillion light years. Because this huge number of bacteria can freely exchange genes that have evolved over billions of years it is not too surprising that new genes giving resistance to clinical antibiotics appear soon after an antibiotic is introduced. But what is surprising is that it is not just antibiotics driving resistance - pollutants and waste disposal practices may also be contributing to this process.

Source: <http://planetearth.nerc.ac.uk/features/story.aspx?id=207>

Quality of life in chemical warfare survivors with ophthalmologic injuries: the first results from Iran Chemical Warfare Victims Health Assessment Study

Iraq used chemical weapons extensively against the Iranians during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). The aim of this study was to assess the health related quality of life (HRQOL) in people who had ophthalmologic complications due to the sulfur mustard gas exposure during the war.

Methods: The Veterans and Martyrs Affairs Foundation (VMAF) database indicated that there were 196 patients with severe ophthalmologic complications due to chemical weapons exposure.

Of these, those who gave consent (n = 147) entered into the study. Quality of life was measured using the 36-item Short Form Health Survey (SF-36) and scores were compared to those of the general public.

In addition logistic regression analysis was performed to indicate variables that contribute to physical and mental health related quality of life.

Results: The mean age of the patients was 44.8 (SD = 8.7) ranging from 21 to 75 years. About one-third of the cases (n= 50) reported exposure to chemical weapons more than once.

The mean exposure duration to sulfur mustard gas was 21.6 years (SD = 1.2). The lowest scores on the SF-36 subscales were found to be: the role physical and the general health.

Quality of life in chemical warfare victims who had ophthalmologic problems was significantly lower than the general public (P<0.001). The results obtained from logistic regression analysis indicated that those who did not participate in sport activities suffer from a poorer physical health (OR = 2.93, 95% CI = 1.36 to 6.30, P = 0.006).

The analysis also showed that poor mental health was associated with longer time since exposure (OR = 1.58, 95% CI = 1.04 to 2.39, P = 0.03) and lower education (OR = 3.03, 95% CI = 1.21 to 7.56, P = 0.01).

Conclusion: The study findings suggest that chemical warfare victims with ophthalmologic complications suffer from poor health related quality of life. It seems that the need for provision of health and support for this population is urgent.

In addition, further research is necessary to measure health related quality of life in victims with different types of disabilities in order to support and enhance quality of life among this population.

Author: Batool Mousavi, Mohammad Reza Soroush and Ali Montazeri

Credits/Source: Health and Quality of Life Outcomes 2009, 7:2

http://7thspace.com/headlines/302213/quality_of_life_in_chemical_warfare_survivors_with_ophthalmologic_injuries_the_first_results_form_iran_chemical_warfare_victims_health_assessment_study.html

University Develops Medical "Surge" Calculator for WMD Strikes

5 February 2009

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore have developed a free programme to help public health organizations anticipate the "surge" of patients they would face after a chemical, biological or radiological attack, the school announced yesterday.

The Web-based program, dubbed Electronic Mass Casualty and Planning Scenarios, accounts for factors such as wind conditions, germ incubation periods and health care resources to determine the potential impact on hospitals of terrorist attacks and other major disasters.

"Biological, chemical, radiological or explosive attacks can bring hospitals and local health agencies to their knees, quickly overwhelming their ability to care for mass casualties," Johns Hopkins University emergency medicine head Gabor Kelen said in a statement. "Our software lets users put their own information into the modeling software, customize it to their needs, and predict what they will need to handle a surge in casualties".

Source: http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090205_9372.php

ARMS CONTROL

Iraq Joins the Chemical Weapons Convention

14 January 2009

The government of Iraq has deposited its instrument of accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) with the Secretary General of the United Nations and within 30 days, on 12 February 2009 became the 186th State Party to the Convention

"Iraq's accession draws us closer to the Convention's goal of the universal ban on chemical weapons, and we call upon those nine States that have not yet adhered to the Convention to do so without delay," Ambassador Pfirter said.

All States Parties declare to the OPCW the extent of specific activities which could pose a risk to the object and purpose of the Convention. These activities are then subject to international verification and monitoring by the OPCW Secretariat, primarily through

inspections, to ensure non-proliferation. States Parties also agree to abide by a verification regime for certain toxic chemicals and their precursors in order to ensure that such chemicals are only used for purposes not prohibited.

Iraq will now be eligible to benefit from the OPCW's international cooperation and assistance programmes, which provide support in drafting and enacting the legislation necessary to implement the Convention at the national level. This legislation enables States Parties to detect, prosecute and punish any breach of the chemical weapons ban committed on their territory or by their nationals anywhere in the world.

Source: <http://www.opcw.org/news/news/article/iraq-joins-the-chemical-weapons-convention/>

G8 cash not enough for arms disposal, says Russia

28 January 2009

MOSCOW (Reuters) - Russia said on 28 January that it might have to slow down destruction of its huge Soviet-era stocks of chemical and other weapons of mass destruction because its G8 partners were not providing enough funds to carry out the work.

The Group of Eight industrialized nations clinched a \$20 billion deal in 2002 to help Russia get rid of chemical, nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction and stop them falling into the wrong hands.

The program, dubbed "the G8 Global Partnership," aims to help destroy chemical weapons, dismantle aging reactors aboard decommissioned nuclear-powered submarines and dispose of fissile materials.

"The problem is, while Russia meets its obligations in full, the rest of the G8 nations which made this commitment up to now have met these obligations by 40-45 percent," said Andrei Bokarev, a senior finance ministry official and one of Russia's G8 point men.

"Taking into account the current situation shaping up amid the global crisis, naturally there appear big doubts that these funds will be made available in the volume needed," he said.

"In this case we will be forced to either slow down the earlier announced tempo of processing chemical and other types of weapons, or we will start looking for additional funds in Russia in order to offset a lack of funds from our G8 partners."

Russia's then President Vladimir Putin, who is now a powerful prime minister, said after reaching the 2002 deal Russia had no security problems and denied that weapons of mass destruction could pass into the hands of militant groups or "rogue states" like Iran, Iraq or North Korea.

But Moscow admitted at the time that there was an ecological threat from remaining Soviet-era stocks of chemical weapons and nuclear waste.

Source: <http://www.reuters.com/article/GCA-Russia/idUSTRE50R5NE20090128>

DISARMAMENT

Indian Cabinet nod to MoU with Sweden on healthcare

New Delhi (PTI): The government approved signing a pact with Sweden for bilateral cooperation in the field of healthcare and public health. The Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation in healthcare and public health is a result of discussions Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss had with Swedish ministers during various meetings spread over during 2008.

A meeting of the Union Cabinet, chaired by External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, gave its nod to the Health Ministry's proposal to sign the MoU with Sweden, Home Minister P Chidambaram told reporters here. The pact is expected to be signed during the visit of Swedish Secretary of State in the last week of this month, he said.

The Cabinet also approved four amendments to the Chemical Weapons Convention Act and a Bill to carry out the changes will be introduced in Parliament session beginning on Thursday. "The amendments are required to bring the Act in line with the Chemical Weapons Convention," Chidambaram said.

Source: <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/holnus/002200902111676.htm>

Discrepancies Found in U.S. Nerve Agent Storage, Destruction Numbers

9 February 2009

Figures for the storage of lethal nerve agents at bases around the United States do not match accountings for disposal of the material, creating a small chance that some might be lost, the Deseret (Utah) News reported on 4 January 2009.

A U.S. Army Audit Agency report indicates that officials believe the material was eliminated rather than missing.

While it generally lauded the bases' accounting, the report said the figures for storage of nerve agent in bulk containers did not line up with destruction figures.

"They did not have effective procedures in place to ensure amounts destroyed were accurately recorded in the (electronic recording) system. Consequently, CMA didn't have complete assurance that amounts recorded in the system were accurate," the report said.

The redacted version of the report did not indicate all the specific storage depots at which problems were found, but the Deseret Chemical Depot in Utah was among that group, the News reported.

The depots should develop databases for recording disposal figures and quickly addressing any accounting problems, auditors said. The Chemical Materials Agency said it accepted the auditors' findings and would make the recommended fixes unless they necessitated amendments to international agreements.

The Chemical Weapons Convention requires destruction of the full U.S. chemical arsenal by April 2012. Pentagon officials have acknowledged that the United States will miss the deadline by several years.

Source: http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090209_8393.php

Disclaimer

Chemical and Biological News Digest is a collection of news reports and press releases published in various newspapers and media related to the subject.

The news reports have been abridged to provide clarity. IDSA is not responsible for the accuracy and authenticity of the news items.



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